A Novel of Passion and Death by the Author of JEWEL OF THE JAVA SEA
GOLD MEDAL BOOK
Naked Ebony
Dan Cushman
An original novel—not a reprint

Naked Ebony

A GOLD MEDAL ORIGINAL

By Dan Cushman

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Chapter One

THE ELECTRIC power had failed, stilling the automatic punkahs, leaving the winehouse close and hot. It smelled. It smelled of men, and petrol lamps, and cheap cognac, and the creeping miasma of the Congo beneath its floor.

After long waiting with his elbows propped on the table, Crawford turned his head and spoke:

"Botamba, are you there?"

"Aye, Master.'"

"Fill my glass."

Botamba, a huge black man in a purple *kuftan* and green turban, moved away from the wall and poured from the long-necked cognac bottle. Then, towering above, he asked:

"Tell me, O Master, wilt thou slay him as he comes through the door, or wilt thou wait until he reaches thy table?"

Speaking with bitter emphasis from one side of his mouth, Crawford said, "I'll kill him, you hear me? I'll kill him. I promised to do it before, and I didn't have the guts, but this time, by Allah, I'll kill him!"

"Aye, aye, Allah! *Allahumma salli alaya.* Tell me, O Master, wilt thou strangle him with thy hands, that slinking Yankee tooter of trumpets, or wilt thou cave in his slats with thy mighty feet?"

"I'll get him with my two hands, like this. And I'll bend him. Behold me, Botamba, how I will bend him, over my knee, like this, and when I get him so his spine is ready to crack, I'll bend him a little more, and then a little more. . . ." He stopped. Perspiration had sprung out along his hairline. He wiped it away, and spat out the brown-paper Moroccan cigarette that had been scissored in one corner of his mouth.

He was a medium-tall man, with shoulders that made him seem short. He might have been thirty or thirty-

five. The tropics had turned his skin to leather. It was the hue of oiled *okume* wood. He was ugly without apology, but his ugliness was good to look on. Seated, half hidden by pillars and dusty potted palms in the dimmest corner of the room, he resembled some malevolent god from a Hindu temple.

He cursed a little, got his breath, and took a swallow of the cognac. It was bad, very bad. He beat the table with his fist and cried, "Brissaud, you illegitimate son of a camel, you eater of raw snails!"

Brissaud, a skinny hook-nosed Gascon, stopped fiddling with the battery wireless and hurried around the bar. *"Oui, monsieur!"*

"You call this cognac? This typhus water? This turpentine?"

"Monsieur, the label. Behold the label! Le Mont Marsan, the first pressing of the grapes."

"I ordered cognac. French cognac. Cognac! Cognac!" He kept saying the word over, striking the table with his fist while Brissaud, with the bottle in both hands, bowed and retreated.

Tense with admiration, the Gargantuan black man said, "Thou art a mighty man, O Crawford."

"I'm a weak-kneed, spineless, East St. Louis, Illinois, variety of jackass or I wouldn't even be here. After five years' experience with that trumpet player, you'd think I'd learn my lesson. You'd think I'd have brains enough to head the other direction when he sends for me, but no, here I am, in this dive, this hole, slinking in the back way, dark of the moon."

"Why must he meet thee in secret, O Master? Perhaps he brings thee the news of great fortune. Do not forget, bwana, that thou art eighteen months behind in my wages, and if that Eddie hath indeed unearthed the treasure of Sheba or the sarcophagus of the golden pharaoh—"

"He hasn't a plugged Spanish bit piece to his name or he wouldn't be hunting me out. If you want my judgment, he's in trouble with the colonial gendarmes again

and wants me to smuggle him to British ground. And if he is, he can go to hell. I wouldn't give him the sweat off the hind side of a Hindu."

A slight current of air rustled the bamboo shutters. Crawford opened his shirt and lay back in the rattan chair. He was like that, perfectly still, his eyes closed, when Brissaud returned with a second bottle of cognac.

"See, monsieur? It is the same as the first. Behold the seal signifying the tax of the French government! Before your very eyes I will—"

"Sure, Brissaud. I'm a little out of sorts. It's not your fault if the cognac's bad. A man that wants civilized liquor should never come to this country. A man that wants *anything* shouldn't come to this country."

Brissaud grinned, showing his yellowish teeth, and said, "Oh, thees is not such a bad country. Let me tell you when I was a boy in France, I was apprenticed to a *tonnelier,* what you call barrelmaker, in the city of Toulouse. Every morning before dawn I went to work, and each night after dark I was through. For all that I received in wage enough for red wine and cabbage. No siesta. Here with maybe one thousand Yankee bucks, a man can have five wives and siesta forever. No, monsieur, for easy living this country does not need to take the hind chair from anywhere."

"It's a hell of a country."

Brissaud pitied him with a laugh and a shake of his head. "Eh, so. Why are you here? To find your fortune. To get your pants full of money. And what if you did? What would you do if you did make the big killing you have always talked about?"

"There will be a big killing tonight!" intoned Botamba, lifting a forefinger the size of a banana. "When the trumpet-playing Yankee walks inside the door—"

"Keep still, you filthy infidel." Crawford had a drink from the new bottle, nodded that it was satisfactory, and went on, "You're damned betcha I'll make a killing sometime. I don't mean any million, maybe not even a million in francs, but just give me enough to get pas-

sage back to East St. Louis and enough left over to start a beer joint and maybe a little horse book on the side. I wouldn't ask for more. I used to know a girl back there, a waitress—"

"Ha! She'd be married ten years ago and has five kids already. Besides, all your money would be lost at the casino before you got outside of Brazzaville. You are like every other jungle tramp. You will die in this country, and they will bury you, and after six months not even the bones will be left, and there will be nothing except a heap of empty bottles to show that a white man has passed this way. Thus the white man in the jungle."

"The hell with you!" growled Crawford.

He waited. It was a quiet night in the winehouse. A Senegalese, hunchbacked and gnomelike, climbed the tiny stage, sat cross-legged in front of a bell balafo, and played the "Streets of Madrid" waltz.

After a long wait, Botamba said, "Perhaps he will not come."

"He'll come, broke as usual. And I know just what he'll say. 'Listen, Crawford, old pal,' he'll say, 'I'm just temporarily strapped. All I need is a couple thousand francs. Listen, Crawford, old pal, I got wind of something good and I'll cut you in. A piece of the moon fell to earth over in Ngwela district, and do you know what it's made of? Pure Roquefort cheese, eighty million years old.' " Crawford spat. "I'll kill him, you hear me?"

Botamba whispered, "Master!" and pointed toward the door.

A tall young man had entered and was standing beneath the petrol lamp. He was in his late twenties, perhaps five years younger than Crawford. His hair was straw-colored, very curly, and lighter than his skin. His eyes, after roving the room, finally pierced the gloom to their table.

"Jim!" he cried, and he came with long strides, grinning, his hand thrust far out. "Jim! Jim, come to me and let me kiss you on the cheek!"

"Keep away from me, y' hear? I told you once I never

wanted to see you again, and I meant it. I thought I spotted you two hundred thousand francs to get back to the States. Not only that, I put you on the boat. How in—"

"Oh, that." He cast it off with a wave of his long fingers. He picked up Crawford's half-filled glass, dumped it on the floor, refilled it, and drank. "I got off that tarantula menagerie at Gibraltar. Ran into a Britisher who was headed down for some mahogany concessions. But hell, that's all water down the drain. Tonight, Crawford, I got hold of something big, and naturally, you being my best friend—"

"Here comes the Roquefort cheese," Crawford said.

"What's that?"

Botamba lifted his forefinger and said, "A piece of the moon fell to earth in Ngwela province, and when they found it, behold, it was Roquefort cheese."

"Shut up," said Crawford. "I don't know what your proposition is, Eddie, but I'll tell you this: If you're flat on your financial *derrière,* as usual, you can put the bite on somebody else, because I've bailed you out for the last time. I wouldn't lend you enough to get your trombone out of hock if you promised to toot it steady all the way to Baltimore."

"I have no trombone in hock. It was a trumpet, and I placed it as temporary security with a dignified banking concern in Cairo. And I don't want a loan. Not a centime."

"You don't?"

With a flourish, Eddie Foley drew from the pocket of his jacket a handful of bank notes and let them sift to the table like falling leaves. They were hundred-franc Congo Belge notes, each equal to less than two American dollars on the black bourse, but he kept pulling them out, handful after handful, until Crawford growled:

"Get 'em out of sight before somebody puts a blade through you." Then he asked, "Where's the body?"

"Your sense of humor is as crude as usual. Now, of course, if you don't want any part of this—"

"I could take every franc you got and I wouldn't have eight per cent interest on what you're into me already."

"All right, Crawford me boy," he said, rising and bowing. "If that's the way you want it, then that's the way it's going to be. I wanted to deal you in on something soft. Soft and profitable. A tidy hundred thousand francs for five days' work. But if you say no, it's no."

"Sit down." Crawford, grinning, looked more than ever like a bronze Buddha. "I was just having a little joke. Here, take one more out of the bottle. We been pals for a long time, Eddie. We lived through malaria and Arab cookin' together. Our friendship has been forged in the sun of Senegal and tempered in cognac. That's not the sort of thing you can just take off and kick in the corner like an old shirt. It's like a tattoo—that's what it's like. Cut it off and it makes a scar that's worse than the mark. We're pals, Eddie. Now sit down and tell me all about the hundred thousand francs."

Eddie said, "That's more like it," and poured himself another drink. "This twenty-five thousand is mine, of course. I worked for it, so I'm not splitting it. You can understand the justice in that. But the rest of the hundred thousand we'll cut fifty-fifty."

Crawford said, "Oh," from the side of his mouth. "When do we get that?"

"*You* pick it up. Tonight. Well, not all of it. You pick up another twenty-five thousand tonight. Go to the second floor of the Hotel International. One A.M. You got better than two hours. The International. That's Madame Levasseur's." He leered significantly. "Don't say you've forgotten Madame Levasseur? She—"

"Who do I get the money from, and for what?"

"I was coming to that. You climb to the veranda, making no noise about it, and open Room Eighteen. Don't knock. Just walk in, and close the door after you. There'll be no light on. Just say Eddie sent you for the package."

"Package of what?"

"I haven't inquired. It's a package. You'll be able to carry it. We deliver the package to Mbwemo up in

French territory. Get it there in five days or less and the rest of our hundred thousand francs will be waiting for us."

He said doggedly, "I want to know what's in it."

"I'll tell you one thing that's in it. There's a hundred thousand Belge francs in it for us, and according to my arithmetic that equals just about two thousand good, solid Yankee bucks. You got any better way of earning two thousand American in five days?"

Crawford muttered, "Contraband diamonds!"

"If that's the case, we'll keep 'em for ourselves. Anyhow, it's not contraband. This is legitimate. Not that it makes a centime difference to you, but it is. Know who we're delivering it to? Dr. Edmond Douval of the Académie Nationale!"

"Never heard of him."

Eddie Foley held his head and said, "Oh, my God!"

"If it's legitimate, why did you arrange to meet me here, on the quiet, dark of the moon? Why do I gumshoe up there at one A.M. for your damned package?"

Eddie Foley scratched the short growth of whiskers on his chin and said, "Well, there is a little something strange in the business. I was heading down to Brazzaville, and I was slightly short of ready cash for boat fare. Well, they dumped me ashore, that dirty monopolistic—"

"All right!"

"So there I was, living on my credit, spearing a drink or two by playing on a borrowed fiddle at that officers' club up in the compound, when Madame came around with an envelope and this dough and the rest of it. She didn't know what the package was. Claimed she didn't. Hell, I didn't inquire too much. I hadn't seen money in so long I wasn't in any position to inquire."

"You were supposed to sneak it out while the gendarmes weren't watching. Isn't that right?"

"Gendarmes? No, it was Runkhammer. There's something inside that package, and Runkhammer's after it. He showed up in town three days ago and he's been camped on the lower veranda ever since."

"Runkhammer's dead."

"Ha!"

"Runkhammer's dead! The British stretched his neck up at El Fasar eighteen months ago after convicting him of that caravan raid during the war."

"You see 'em hang him?"

Crawford growled, "No."

"Well, he's alive, and tough as ever. I tried to slip past him last night and the night before, but it was no use. I heard him—"

"*You* haven't the guts to slip past him, but you want me to do it."

"Well, that's how we always did things, Crawford. I did the thinking, and you have a strong back."

"You yellow bastard," said Crawford. "You cheap punk. You lousy ten-day stiff."

"You essence of camel's dung!" Botamba intoned. "Now indeed will my master kill thee as—"

"Keep out of this. Eddie, one of these days I'll give you a real appraisal of your character, but tonight I haven't got the time. All I'll say is this: If you want me to take the chances, you'll give me half the money, so dig up."

"Hold on. You did nothing for this."

"Half of it, starting now, or I'll toss in with Runkhammer."

"You wouldn't do that to me, Jim. Not to your old pal."

"Oh, wouldn't I?" said Crawford with his hand out for the money. "The hell I wouldn't!"

Chapter Two

CRAWFORD gave Ed Foley some instructions about getting the outfit in order, arranged to meet him later at the abandoned Franconi palm-nut storehouse, and with Botamba at his heels walked up a lorry road toward the main part of town. It was still a few minutes short of midnight, so he didn't hurry.

He kept thinking of Runkhammer. The Hammer, men called him, and it was a good name.

"Runkhammer," he repeated.

"O Master," said Botamba, "if that Runkhammer really lives and breathes as the tooter of trumpets says, then I would give him distance like a rogue elephant."

"I'll knock his teeth down his throat."

"O Master, bear in mind that thou owest me eighteen months in back wages, and it is the word of the Prophet that he who dyeth in his servant's debt shall enter paradise on his belly, crawling through the eighth gate, which is neither tall enough for a crocodile nor wide enough—"

"To hell with you," said Crawford.

The last he'd seen of Runkhammer was in Mozambique, on the hot, airless terrace of the Hotel Covilha, where there'd been talk about hijacking some Arab dhows that were transporting crude opium by moonlight from British mandate to the north. The Hammer had been drunker than usual that night, and he'd filled in the gaps on his career. He had started as a commissioned officer in the British army of India, and had been retired after locking himself in a room with two Sikh noncoms and beating them to death with his fists. Afterward he found employment that suited him. He joined the Foreign Legion and deserted, he fought on both sides of the uprising in Afghanistan, and served as a full general with the army of Haile Selassie until the

Italian victory, when he departed with an important chunk of the Ethiopian crown jewels. He married the only daughter of J. T. DeForest and shook South Africa first as a promoter and then as a swindler. A year afterward, in Cairo, when Crawford met him for the first time, he lacked money to get his luggage out of the Continental-Savoy. Crawford never believed they'd hanged him. Men like Runkhammer die hard.

The lorry tracks led around a cluster of storehouses with rusty tin roofs, and up a slight rise of ground to the white man's part of Bakoville and the military compound. There were lights, and somewhere a wireless crackled with static, so the power plant was evidently back in operation. Muffled, a heavy vibration through earth and air, came the regular impulse of a hippo drum. They'd been beating it that evening before he went inside the winehouse, its sound had penetrated the walls, and still it was beating. He'd almost ceased to notice it. It had become, like the whine of mosquitoes and the cries of chitchats, a part of the jungle night. Someone, operating the wireless, turned it loudly on the BBC news summary from Nairobi. The incongruity of the sounds, wireless mingled with native drums, made him pause, and laugh, and spit out the dead stump of cigarette in his lips.

Botamba was talking, as he had been every step of their way along the lorry road:

"Let me tell you of this bwana, this noble Englishman. What if I should be cut short by fever or the blade of an assassin? he asked himself. Who would care for my faithful servants? Who would keep them from poverty? Aye, and so what did he do, this Englishman, but insure his very life with the underwriters, and leave the papers in the strong vault in Elizabethville. Aye, Allah, what a great man was this! How I envy a servant who hath for a master one who would return even from the grave to pay his debts! Aye, such a master will ride a green camel through the clouds of paradise even as the Prophet himself!"

Crawford said, "I keep you bailed out of the prison compounds, don't I? I keep your gut full of koos-koos and beer, don't I? What do you want of money? Every time it's payday you get in trouble with the gendarmes."

"Money, money, Allah, money! To the jingle of money do all doors open, even the doors of the sultan's harem. With money in his purse is the most lowly a king, but broke and bankrupt does he lie in the dust as low as camel's dung."

"You stick with me," Crawford said. "I'll be in the bucks one of these days, and I'll pay you your back wages with interest compound and semiannual. You're damn right I will. We'll burn that lousy old *'jeballa* you got on, and get you a new one, of Hyderabad satin, with pants to match, and sabots that turn up at the toes. I'll send you back to your two wives in Katanga looking like old King Razz McTazz himself. Hear me, O Allah, I swear it by the mighty shrines of East St. Louis. Now let's have a look at the automatic."

Botamba lowered the uniform can he'd been carrying on his head, unlocked it, and took out a Mauser pistol. It was a blued steel, prewar model, one of the big ones with the magazine in front of the trigger, giving it an ugly, forward-heavy look. He tossed it, and Crawford caught it deftly by the butt. He appraised its balance, glanced at the magazine and the ejecting mechanism to make certain it hadn't been fouled by a coating of fungus, then thrust it out of sight beneath his white cotton coat.

Botamba chanted, "Thou art wise to take the pistol. Neither would *I* face that Runkhammer barehanded."

"If things work out right I'll not have to face Runkhammer at all."

The road led them through a market, closed for the night but still giving off the foul stench of butchering. The road became a street. They walked through more palms and up some masonry steps leading to the front gate of a hotel compound.

The International. It was a big place for a back-river

port such as Bakoville. In the old days, before the war, when the Belgian minister of colonies occasionally authorized a brochure designed to attract foreign capital to the middle Congo, the International, with its graceful pillars and verandas, was always shown, although the brochure neglected to mention that it was a monument to the bankrupt scheme that had visualized Bakoville as the palm-oil capital of central Africa. Back in those optimistic days, the International had boasted a garden of trimmed frangipanis and cape jasmines and neat pathways of whitewashed cobbles, but there was nothing like that visible tonight. The jungle had moved in. Only the front door and a bit of veranda were visible. There was no whitewash on the stones. The fancy carved pillars bore thick, amorphous coverings of vines. A window through which light shone was translucent brown with fungus. And all this in sixteen years! It was a rotten country, a sinkhole country.

Crawford said, "Stay here," and walked up the termite-weakened steps to the lower veranda.

He stood straight and quiet, looking around. Movement at his feet startled him. A native boy was curled up asleep on a bit of palm matting, and Crawford had almost stepped on him.

At his left was the stairway to the second veranda. He was tempted to go up, but he was still almost an hour early. He thought about it for a while. He'd planned to avoid Runkhammer, to sneak past him somehow if he was on watch, to get the package, and leave. Now he almost changed his mind. Avoiding Runkhammer made him feel small and cowardly. Sometimes the best way to handle a man like Runkhammer was to walk up to him, and have a drink for old times' sake, and say, "Don't get in my way unless you want lead in your guts." He wiped sweat off his cheeks and neck, cursed, and decided instead to see Madame Levasseur.

A door led to a little lounge. The lounge still held the shut-in heat of afternoon. It was dimly illuminated by reflected light from a hallway. The ant traps, he noticed,

were dry of creosote. A gekko dropped from the ceiling with a soft thud and scurried away through the floor mattings. The place had gone even farther downhill than he'd supposed.

He crossed, moved quietly along the hall, and paused in the open door.

Madame Levasseur was seated in a rocking chair, sipping white wine, reading a dog-eared copy of *La Mode*. Her back was turned, and for a while she didn't realize he was there. She was getting on past her middle thirties, and quinine and the climate had given her a bilious look. It had softened her, and turned her hair the dull hue of burlap, but for all that she was not a bad looker. Not *too* bad. Crawford was almost sorry he had that other, more urgent business demanding his time.

He said, "Hello, Duckling."

She started and almost spilled the wine. For a few seconds she didn't realize who he was; then she caught her breath, put down the glass, straightened her dress, and patted her hair with a faded coquetry.

"Monsieur!" she said with a little tremulous lift in her voice. "Monsieur Crawford, it has been so long!"

He laughed with nervousness under his tone, and moved on inside. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, it's been a while."

She stood and looked up at him. She tilted her head back and watched him beneath fluttering eyelids. "You have a cheek to come back, Monsieur. *Oui,* a terrible American cheek. After every-theeng! After the things you promised!"

"Yeah, you know what a liar I am. A liar and a jungle tramp. You were lucky to get rid of me. I'd have been no good for you. I'd have drunk up all you owned and you'd have ended by plugging me with that Star pistol you used to keep tucked under the edge of the bed."

Madame Levasseur sighed with a great heave of her bosom. "Thus fate, monsieur. Then you are only that tonight—a guest."

"I'm not even a guest. I came to pick up a package."

Her face instantly hardened, and the coquetry was gone. She shot a glance toward the open door and back again. He followed the direction of her eyes, but there was nobody there.

"What—package?" she whispered.

"I guess you know more about that than I do. I'm talking about the package Ed Foley was supposed to get from Room Eighteen at exactly one o'clock."

She whispered fiercely, "I should have known he was too great a coward to do it alone!"

"Oh, don't be too tough on little Eddie. He just didn't want to collide with the Hammer, and I can't say I blame him. What the hell, Duckling? What you trying to sneak out of here? Crude opium? Wildcat diamonds?"

She went past him, closed the door, and stood with her shoulders against it. "I wish I have never heard of the package. Of *it,* or of *her.* Now go get it, if the package is all you want. Go get it, and get out!"

He made no move to go. He lit a cigarette, inhaled, and blew smoke, all without taking his eyes off her. Her unusual agitation surprised him. "This is no way for old sweethearts to act. If that package isn't perfectly legitimate, you know I wouldn't soil my fingers with it."

"Ha!"

He walked to her and placed his hands on her waist as though to lift her.

"I'm a trustworthy man, Duckling. There's something bothering you, and I want you to tell me what it is. If it's just Runkhammer, why—"

She twisted away from him. "I tell you I know nothing about it. She came here, hired a room, said she was afraid of robbery."

"She? Who is she?"

"How would I know? She came down the Lluisaba alone. In a canoe with paddle boys, but alone—without white men. There was this—package. All day she stays locked in her room. I run a decent hotel, monsieur, and not a nest of brigands!"

"When did the Hammer get here?"

"That swine, smashing my glasses, hurling bottles—"

"Did he follow her here?"

"Eh, I don't know. I tell you I don't know! She says she is afraid of robbery. She asked me to hire somebody who would carry the package to Mbwemo. There was nobody I could think of except that, that—"

"Yeah, Eddie? How much money did you give him?"

"Twenty-five thousand francs."

"Well, I'm damned!" Crawford struck the table with the heel of his palm and laughed. "Well, I'm damned! He told me the truth!"

Chapter Three

CRAWFORD refused wine, but he didn't refuse when she insisted on breaking out a bottle of Courvoisier. He stopped, reluctantly, at a single glass, talked through the burning time of a cigarette, and glanced at his watch.

She was back to fluttering her eyelashes again. "Monsieur, you are really going on that foolish trip with the package? Wait! I do not know what it is, but if Runkhammer is involved, then it is not good. The girl is afraid. Why did she not appeal to the *gendarmerie?* Why? Why?"

"I don't know. All I know is there's a couple of thousand American bucks in the deal."

"I'd have nothing to do with it!"

"I wouldn't either, only poverty is a pretty extenuating circumstance. I got to go, Duckling. Maybe, sometime . . ."

She spoke with bitter resignation. "Sometime, as the Americans say, you will run out of luck. When you walk from that door into the jungle of who-knows-what, it's a two-to-one chance we will never see each other again."

"You thinking about Runkhammer?"

"I am meaning all the cheap ways you gamble your life. You should have a good woman to look after you."

He laughed and reached over to pat her hand. "Don't worry about me. I've changed. You're looking at the new Crawford. I'm over that kid stuff. No foolish chances. From here on it's me first, last, and final. I'm going to come out of this lousy sinkhole country with a stake, and then it's good-by forever. Maybe I'll come back and get you, Duckling. You talk about Paris—hell! You ought to see East St. Louis, the Athens of the middle Mississippi. I'd rather see the smoke of those railroad shops than watch the sun set over Mount Olympus. You know where the Browns are? In the cellar. *Le donjon.* No wonder.

I'm the only fan they got, and here I am in the Congo. Thanks for the brandy, Duckling, and turn out the light."

When the room was dark, he opened the door. He stood a few seconds, listening. Through walls of hardwood and woven bamboo came the sounds from the bar, and remotely, from a distant portion of the building, the crackling noise of a wireless. A breeze flowed in from the rear veranda with a fresh night smell. The breeze vanished, leaving the air closer than before. He moved along, through the dark, and stopped suddenly. Someone was in the hall, waiting.

He stood still and heard the shifting of a man's weight. A heavy man. It trembled the termite-weakened floor.

He said, "Hello, Runkhammer."

The man made a sudden, surprised start and exhaled through his nostrils. He laughed as though it had unnerved him to be recognized in the dark. It was Runkhammer, all right.

He took a couple of groping steps and said, "Crawford? That you, Crawford?"

"You know damned well it is."

Runkhammer's laugh, deep in his throat, showed he was his old self again. Crawford had heard him laugh in that manner many times, and now, in the dark, he could imagine exactly how he looked in doing it—the thick-corded neck, the heavy jaw, the teeth clamped shut. "Now, I *did* hear of you being around." There was something about Runkhammer's speech that was British, and something that wasn't. A man could tell he wasn't from England. His accent was more Oxford than cockney, but actually it was neither.

Crawford said, "What the hell are *you* doing here? You're supposed to be dead with a rope around your neck up in the British territory."

"I should have been dead ten years ago, chappie, and so also should you." He kept moving, groping, breathing heavily through his nostrils. "Damn it, man, where are you? Stand still so I can put my hand on you to see if

you're real." He got a hand and arm around Crawford's shoulders. They were about the same height, but Runkhammer was much thicker. He was built on the lines of a percheron horse. When he laughed it was with his neck and shoulders and down his back, so the force of it shook Crawford along with him. "But that's a low slanderin' lie spread by my enemies, s'help me it is, Crawford. There might have been some loose talk about hanging, but they didn't have a case, not legally before British law."

"Did you stick around for the trial?"

"I would, but you know how slow the courts are. I've been a lot closer than that to my maker." He stopped for a few seconds and went on in a slightly different tone, "You know, the truth is I got providence ridin' on my shoulder like a pet parrot. Those colonial busybodies couldn't hang me. Not even if I hadn't busted their mud jail. Gawd is savin' me for something."

"Maybe you'll be the lion that lies down with the lamb."

"Joke if you like, but that don't rub away the proof, and the proof is this: I was shot through the heart with a British three-o-three."

Crawford laughed. "Did it kill you?"

"Don't laugh at what you don't understand, laddie. Listen about it. This happened three years ago when me and a Portuguese skipper by the name of Fortazala were nosing along the Red Sea coast with a bit of private cargo when one of old Ibn's gunboats sighted us and cut loose with artillery and small arms, and when I woke up I was on my back in a Suez hospital with every medico from there to Alexandria around staring at me like I'd just given birth to an eight-pound son. Yes, Crawford, I'd been hit through the heart with a British three-o-three, and there I was, alive, a medical celebrity.

"You'd have ruptured your bloomin' guts laughin' at their high and mighty talk about misplaced hearts and high-velocity clotures, but I rose up and said, 'To hell with you.' I said, 'To hell with all science. I've seen too much of the Black Avodoun to think that there's got to

be a logical explanation for everything. I've been in Dahomey and I've seen the dead raised from their graves and worked empty-eyed without souls in the mahogany concessions.' That's what I said to 'em."

Runkhammer swung Crawford in the crook of his powerful arm while he named his doctors suitably in several tongues. "I said, 'To hell with you, I'm leaving here,' and I did." Memory of it made him roar with laughter. "You should have seen 'em, them nurses, screamin' and carryin' on, and me in that hospital jacket that came to my navel with somethin' less'n 'arf of that behind, like Kipling said, but I don't imagine they get a look at a man like me every day. To hell with 'em. To hell with all doctors. They still got my pants and they're welcome to 'em. I'm alive because it was the will of Gawd."

"Well, don't push your luck too far, eavesdropping on private conversation."

"I'd been to the *piccinnin kia* when the Madame's door flew open, and there you were. Struck me dumb for a while, I was so surprised to see you. By the bye, how you getting on with the old girl? Don't take offense, but I've heard it noised around that you're the only man in the Congo that can stay here without paying room rent." He got close and whispered, "I've even heard she could put you up without makin' an extra bed."

"To hell with you."

Reaching the front veranda, Runkhammer tripped over the sleeping native boy. He cursed, kicked him until he got out of the way, and then, roaring with laughter, he clapped Crawford between the shoulders.

"Old friends, Yank! I'll tell you about my love affairs if you'll tell me about yours. Sometime I'll tell you about the time I rescued the daughter of the district commissioner from the Tuaregs up past Archambault. Prisoner in a mud hut, she was. And naked. Yes, without so much as a babouche on her feet. Her and her black hair and milk-white skin. I carried her away like that, Crawford. I carried her away along the river trail through the heat of siesta until the darkness caught us at an abandoned

cave village along the cliffs. And I took her home. Took her home like a British army man, though not by the shortest way. She clung to me, Crawford. Clung to me, so timid she hid her eyes against my shoulder all the while her arms were around my neck."

"You swine."

"Swine be damned. She hasn't been content with her lot since, by what I hear."

Crawford could see him plainly now. He seemed even wider and thicker than he remembered, but there was no fat on him. He was dressed in whites that had sweat-wrinkled to the lines of his body. On his head, pushed back to reveal some short-roached hair, was a topee badly in need of pipe-claying. He grinned exactly the way Crawford had pictured him in the dark, with his jaw set, his lips peeled back revealing a set of powerful yellowish teeth.

His face was square cut. His forehead was heavily ledged with bone, but there was nothing apelike about it. It was a high forehead, and broad, the type popularly supposed to indicate intelligence. His skin was oily and brown. His upper lip was roughened by a mustache so short and so nearly the color of his skin that a person was likely to overlook the fact that he had a mustache at all. Still, in some manner it stamped him as a Britisher; it served as a reminder that he once had been an officer in His Majesty's forces. Nothing else about his face was favorable. His nose had been broken and reset crookedly; a scar puckered an area of an inch and a half on his left cheek. He had the look of a white barbarian and a brute, both of which he was, and yet there was something about his masculinity that was almost handsome.

He elbowed Crawford and, still grinning, said, "I've had my way with women, Yank. Black ones and white ones and the hues in between, and it's all private business, sacred to myself, and I'd not breathe a word of it to anybody but my friends. Friends that's been through the wars with me—like you."

"You'd cut my throat for a hundred francs."

Runkhammer roared laughter. His teeth bared, the muscles thickened on his neck. A man standing in front of Runkhammer's laughter would feel as if he'd been hit by a fist. He stopped and wiped moisture from the outside corners of his eyes.

"No, I'd not cut your throat for a hundred francs. I wouldn't cut your throat for less'n a hundred pound sterling. You got my word as a gentleman and an army man."

He kept his arm around Crawford's shoulder, trying to steer him toward the bar. "Come on now, lad. We got to have a drink together for old times' sake."

"Not now."

Runkhammer made a sound in his throat. He had a quick, savage temper, and it almost got away from him. He still showed his teeth, but the corners of his lips had turned down. Runkhammer would give away his last franc, or he'd kill you with his hands, depending on the mood he was in.

"I don't like it when men refuse to drink with me."

"I'll drink with you, but I got something to do first."

"What are you going to do?"

"Maybe I was headed out back for the *piccinnin kia.* You want to come along and help?"

"No. No, you were headed for no *piccinnin kia.* You came here after night, and you didn't go to the bar. Yank, this is the first time I ever saw you go past a place where liquor was sold."

With angry sharpness, Crawford barked, "Well, it's my own business."

"Eh? I'm not so sure." He grabbed Crawford by the arm. "Wait! You're going nowhere yet. Why are you here? Did somebody send for you? Perhaps you have an idea of picking up a piece of easy cash without letting your old friends in on it."

Crawford pulled away from him. "Get out of my way."

"No, I won't get out of your way. You or no other man's way. Where were you going when you left Madame's room? I thought it was a little bit strange, you blinking the light off before you showed yourself." He stood with

his feet wide set, blocking the passage. He hooked his thumbs in the band of his pants and pulled them up so the legs were tight around his thighs. He roared, "Answer my question. Where were you going?"

Crawford moved and pivoted, and swung a left to his jaw. It was a short, shocking blow. It rocked Runkhammer's head and made him stagger back. His hands were up, but ineffective. Crawford, moving on, made a quarter pivot and brought up a right with all the lifting power of his legs.

It hit like a sledge on the point of Runkhammer's jaw. He staggered backward. He tried to catch himself and couldn't. He backpeddled for seven or eight steps, trying to outrace the momentum of his body. His heel caught in a fold in the matting and he sat down with a jolt that shook the veranda.

He sat with his hands braced behind him. His eyes stared at Crawford. His topee rolled in a circle on the floor. Still watching Crawford, he fumbled, got the topee, and put it on his head. Beside him was a disused table with a couple of crippled chairs stacked on it. He reached, got his forearm on the table edge, and lifted himself first to one knee, then to his feet. He knocked the chairs off with a backward sweep of his left arm, seized the table, swung it overhead, and hurled it.

Crawford tried to deflect it with an outflung arm. The table was heavy *okume* wood. It smashed through, knocked him off his feet, and left him sprawling in the vines along the front of the veranda.

He rolled to a sitting position. He was webbed in by the vines. He tried to get free. Shock had deadened his muscles. His veins seemed to flow something heavy as quicksilver. Runkhammer had seized one of the chairs. He was ready to charge with it. Crawford could do nothing, only sit with his legs folded under him and paw futilely at the vine.

But Runkhammer had stopped. He stood rigid, erect, the chair high overhead. Botamba, almost invisible in his purple *kuftan,* had come up behind him, his heavy ma-

chete drawn. Its point was held against Runkhammer's spine.

Crawford managed to get to his feet. His right arm felt dead, and he kept running his left hand over it, hunting for a broken bone.

Botamba said, "Shall I kill this unbeliever, Master?"

Runkhammer laughed, and lowered the chair, and tossed it away. "No, you won't kill Runkhammer. I will die, but not here. Not until fate wills it. Not from bullets, not from machetes. Crawford, tell your black boy that he's wasting his time. Tell him I'm the chosen of Allah."

Botamba cried, "I will sever thy spine and leave thee flopping in the dust like a cockerel at the fetish hut."

Crawford said, "Put the knife away!"

The commotion had brought men to the door of the bar. Two of them were Belgian army officers from the cantonment.

The elder of them, a short, very red-faced major, held a biscuit and chicken sandwich in one hand and a glass of white wine in the other. He munched, swallowed, washed it down, licked mayonnaise off his fingers, and said in French, "You are having trouble? I promise you much more—behind the bars of our jail. Eh—what do you think of that?"

Crawford, once more his old self, grinned and said, "Why, this is just a meeting between old friends. The Britisher has been offering me his hospitality, and I've been declining with thanks."

The major grunted, put the rest of his sandwich in his mouth, handed the empty plate and glass to a mulatto waiter who had followed him, and said while chewing, "The machete I do not like. Did you know it was against regulations to carry arms within a kilometer of the compound?"

"It is nothing." Runkhammer walked away from the knife. "Will you believe me when I say that my life was not in the slightest danger? Come, a brandy. You too, Crawford. You will join us!"

"Sure." But Crawford turned the other way. He paused

and looked back from the veranda stairs. "Sure. But like I was saying, not now. You go in there, Runkhammer, and wait for me."

Chapter Four

CRAWFORD climbed the steps slowly, resisting the temptation to look around. The upper veranda was black behind its wall of vines. He groped, touched the inner wall, and waited for Botamba to follow him.

He could hear the major say something, his voice faded, and a screen door slapped shut. It was quiet then, except for the drum at the native village. He named Runkhammer a few suitable things, ran a hand across his bruised arm, and licked salty-tasting blood off the knuckles of his right hand.

Botamba, close to him, muttered, "You should have let me cut him down."

"And you'd have spent the rest of your life with a chain around your neck!"

He tried to recall the plan of the building. The hotel was rectangular, except for the rounded portico at its front entrance. A double veranda ran all the way around. In the center of the building was a patio that once had served as an open-air dining room. The rooms were in suites of two, some with entrances on both the veranda and the patio, and all with at least a window on both sides, giving the cross ventilation that is so desirable in that climate.

Ed Foley had said Room 18. He should have checked on its position when he was talking to Madame Levasseur, but he was quite certain it was on the rear, looking uphill toward the cantonment.

Botamba said, "What did he mean, that Runkhammer, about being the chosen of Allah?"

"Oh, some damned fool idea. He lived after being shot through the heart."

Botamba exhaled with a hissing sound, and Crawford was immediately sorry he'd told him. Especially at night, with the drums beating.

"Come along," he said, and still groping, reached the southwest corner.

A small orange bulb shone through shifting veils of insects, giving a dim light to that side of the veranda. None of the rooms was lighted, none seemed to be occupied. He read the corroded brass numerals 7, 8, and 9. Behind him Botamba kept up an ominous muttering.

"Shot through the heart? A bullet through the heart? Only the devil can live on with a bullet through his heart."

"Well, that explains it."

"You believe, then—"

"Hell, no. I think he's a liar."

"O Master, is it not so that the fetishers of the Black Avodoun have the power to blow life without soul through the nostrils of the new dead, and make them walk forever their slaves?"

"Keep quiet."

He turned the next corner. It was dark again. The drums still thudded, but now, through it, he could hear a wireless—someone announcing in French, then the tinny, unmelodic sound of a jazz band. He saw a reddish point of light, and smelled cigarette smoke. Very dimly he made out a man seated in a footrest chair. The wireless, turned on softly, came from the open door of the room behind him.

The man turned to watch Crawford's approach. His cigarette brightened as he dragged and inhaled before speaking.

"*Goeden avond, mynheer.* Even at midnight, hot, *ja?*"

He was Dutch, a thin tall man, naked except for a pair of shorts. He had a high stand of hair on his chest that looked grayish by the glow of the cigarette. He was about fifty years old.

Crawford said good evening, and agreed that it was hot.

"Iss it often like this in Bakoville, mynheer? This heat-pressing dampness? *Vochtig, ja?* In Leopoldville, the days hot, close, but the nights are good, with breeze. Here, ach! You are living here?"

"No, but I've been here before."

He laughed. "You came back knowing already? *Ik schertst!* No offense. Only a joke I am making. Sit down, sit down. A chair, over there, see?"

"Thanks, but it's cooler this way." He accepted a cigarette from the package that the Dutchman extended in his direction. He took hold of the Dutchman's other hand and guided his cigarette coal up for a light. "I'm looking for a room. What number is this?"

"Fifty-six, something. You are British, mynheer?"

"American."

It wasn't 56. There was no 56. He moved close to the door. The wireless tubes, alight, made a glow by which he could see the shadowy outlines of furniture, but not the brass numerals. He held the cigarette coal close and read them. A 1 and a 9. Number 18, then, was the door he had just passed.

The Dutchman said, "I haff cousin in Chicago. He iss watchmaker. You haff perhaps been in Chicago?"

"I've been there, but I don't know any watchmakers." He grinned and added, "Only bookmakers." He motioned to the next room with his cigarette. "I guess that's it, number eighteen. Anybody been around?"

"I heard—something. Some little thing. You haff companion? Tell him to come out. We will perhaps find schnapps in my bag."

"I'll see about it."

He stood by the door. It was one of the old-fashioned kind made with heavy, adjustable shutters fronted by screen so they could be moved only from the inside. The shutter slats were steeply tilted, preventing a view of the interior even if there'd been a light, but through the openings he could hear, and there was a slight, repeated sound. He imagined it was someone walking; then he realized it was only a jalousie swinging back and forth in a draft from the patio.

He took hold of the knob, turned it, and felt the door swing. It was unlocked.

Botamba had shouldered close to follow, but Crawford

checked him. "Stay here and keep watch," he muttered, and moved into the close blackness of the interior.

He closed the door and stood still, listening. Even the scraping jalousie had now stopped. The air of the room pressed on him with suffocating humidity. There was a tickle of sweat on his cheek.

"Hello," he said. There was no answer.

The cigarette was still in his fingers. He dropped it. The coal broke and scattered fragments of glow across the matting, and blinked out, all but the main one, which he pressed under his boot sole.

His nostrils detected a perfume. It wasn't strong, or cheap. None of your Eau de F. W. Woolworth from the trade stores that the native girls liked to stink themselves with. This was French, the kind that cost fifty bucks the micky bottle.

He stood with his shoulders against the door for about twenty seconds, though it seemed longer. Then he spoke again:

"Hello, I'm Crawford. Ed couldn't come. Someone was watching him. He sent me."

He waited. There was still no answer, but a slight variation of movement came to him across the floor. Not a heavy weight like Botamba or Runkhammer. And there was another odor—the slightly rancid, slightly ammonia odor of collodian gun solvent.

He said, "Now, darling, go easy with the gun."

She drew in her breath suddenly. It surprised her that he'd guessed she was there, and that she had a gun drawn.

She said, "Ver' well, monsieur." She had a soft, rather husky voice. French. Not Belgian-French, but the type of French you ran into around Marseille. He heard the rustle of palm mattings under her feet as she groped her way across the room. A table or chair rocked with a little thud as she touched it. She said, "Bolt the door."

"Sure, ma'am." He fumbled and tossed the bolt hard so she could hear it.

"Now turn on the light."

He couldn't find the drop cord.

"Turn on the light!"

"Now, darling, just take it easy. Point your little pistol at the floor. You wouldn't want to kill me before I turn the light on. That'd mean you'd have to go to all the work of turning it on yourself. Where is it, anyhow?"

"Stay where you are. I'll find it."

He sensed the odor of her perfume quite close to him. He had the feeling that he could reach out and touch her. The light came on, and she wasn't there. It was only a sixty-watt bulb, but after the long darkness it blinded him.

He closed his eyes tightly and opened them again. She'd backed away, leaving the light swinging on its drop cord. She was a medium-tall girl, thin and dark, but the chief thing he saw was the Browning pistol with its big bore aimed at his breastbone.

He grinned, looking more than ever like a good-natured bronze Buddha, and said, "Now, there's one handful of gun for a little gal. You're squeezing that pretty tight, and I'll bet the safety's not on either." He spread his hands wide of his body. "See? I got no idea of—"

"Stand where you are!"

"Sure, sure, gal. But don't let it explode. You do and what'd you have? Just a hundred and eighty pounds of dead man. Girl, what in the name of Allah would you do with all that dead man?"

She took her eyes off him for a fraction of time while she glanced down at the gun. She tilted it down—not much, it was still pointed at Crawford's thighs—but he felt better about it and decided to breathe.

He filled his lungs and blew out his cheeks. "Whew! Holy hell! You don't need that thing. I'm as peaceful as a mouse at a cobras' reunion. Mind snapping the safety? That thing would tear my leg off."

She moved the barrel a trifle more, but she didn't snap the safety. Her eyes were brown, and their pupils, dilated from the long darkness, made them seem darker even than they were. Her hair was dark, but not jet. Her face

was narrow, her nose high with a Roman bridge. Her skin was not the olive you grew to associate with such features. It had a gold cast, unblemished and very smooth. She was dressed in a man's tan shirt. The way it was wrapped around her waist and tucked in the top of her shorts showed she'd hurried in dressing. Her shorts were knee length, khaki, freshly laundered and pressed, but frayed from the bush. She wore knee socks and native antelope veldschoen.

She spoke after nervously moistening her lips. "Who are you?"

"Didn't I say? I'm Crawford. Ed Foley sent me up here."

"Who were you talking to?" she asked in French.

"Just now? That was a Dutchman in the next room. I never saw him before. Who'd you think it was—Runkhammer?"

The name affected her like an electric charge and her hand flinched dangerously on the gun.

"Where is he?" she asked, switching back to English.

"Below."

"You have seen heem?"

He looked at his knuckles, skinned on Runkhammer's jaw. "I saw him, all right."

"Did you let heem follow?"

"Now, darling, take it easy. Ever notice the safety on that gun? You're supposed to put the safety on when you point it at your friends." He watched her as she fumbled with jerky tense movements and snapped it. "No, the Hammer didn't follow me. He won't, either. Not this far. I have a black askari outside. A competent man. Why don't you lay that gun on the table?"

"Monsieur, I would advise you to stay at your distance."

"All right." He hooked a chair with his toe and sat down in it the wrong way, his arms folded over the back, his chin resting on them. "You don't mind if I sit down? I've had a trying day, and this isn't helping any. I could use a smoke, too."

Through her teeth she said, "Proceed!"

He took one, opened his chemi-dry matchbox, and lighted it. He made every move deliberate, not wanting to startle the Browning. He inhaled to the last cubic centimeter of his lungs and blew the smoke from his nostrils.

He studied her. Light from the brownish electric bulb gave a softness to her skin. It flattered her. He'd always gone for women who were pink and white with big china-blue eyes like the kewpie dolls in a cheap carnival—girls like Abbie, that biscuit shooter back in East St. Louis, the June Haver kind at the cinema. This girl was more Hedy Lamarr. Hedy with a bend on the bridge of her nose. She had Asia Minor blood mixed in with her French. Greek or Semite blood. Not that there was anything wrong with Greek and Semite girls; they just weren't his type.

He dragged again, thinking maybe she wasn't his type, but she'd do until his type came along. She was about twenty-two. She wasn't any Venus in build. She was leggy with narrow hips, but her legs weren't skinny. Her shorts had been tailored for a man, and her thighs filled them. She'd pulled them higher than a man would, making them too tight. Her man's shirt didn't fit her too well, either. It was too wide across the shoulders and yet it drew too strongly across her breasts.

"Who are you?" he asked, and it surprised him when she told him without hesitation:

"Chari Douval."

A shine of gold attracted his attention to her left hand. It was a wedding band.

He said, "*Mrs.* Douval?"

"Yes."

"Where's *Mr.* Douval?"

"*Dr.* Douval!" She said it with her head up, as though she were announcing the Royal Archduke of Monrovia. "Dr. Douval, curator of the Académie Nationale!"

"Never heard of him."

She drew her lips tight and brought the gun up a little.

"Hold it!" he hurried to say. "No disrespect. You ask

me the American League averages for 1939 and I'm the Comptometer Kid, but when it comes to doctors I don't know the Mayos from Bernarr Macfadden. So Dr. Douval is your husband. Where is he?"

"In Mbwemo."

"That's in French territory."

"*Oui.*" She didn't explain. "You have been there?"

"Two seasons ago. I was up there gathering ivory. The gendarmes took it away from me. They accused me of hiring the Sharis to hunt it out of season."

"And you were innocent, of course."

"I was guilty, like every other down-at-the-heel trader that ever goes into that country. They threw it into me for not having cash for the standard bribe."

"Are they still looking for you—the gendarmes?"

"No, I'm in the clear. They confiscated the ivory, and that satisfied them. If you want a package delivered to Mbwemo, the gendarmes won't stand in my way. However, I think there was a small matter of money."

She stood with her lips tightly pressed, looking at him. She still hadn't made up her mind.

She said, "How do I know you're not in weeth heem—Runkhammer?"

"That's the chance you have to take. I'm sorry, Chari, it's either me or nobody. Eddie isn't coming. He sent me. You'll have to take my word for it."

She lowered the gun. She'd been tense for many seconds, and now that she'd come to a decision, he thought she was going to collapse. She had a bad case of shakes. Intending to lend her a hand, he got up so quickly he almost overturned the chair. She saw him, and misunderstanding his movement, tried to bring the gun up again, but he was too close and had her by the wrist.

He forced her hand down and said, "Now, let's not go through all that again."

She twisted back and forth with a sudden feline quickness, and for a second he almost lost her. Then his strength asserted itself.

"Give me the gun. I don't want to hurt you." He

pressed down on the tendons at the base of her thumb, pressed hard, and a little harder, until her fingers were sprung free of its butt. Then with a quick shake he freed the gun. It thudded at his feet, and he bent quickly to grab it.

He stepped back, appraising its balance. The butt felt bulky in his hand after the Mauser. He pulled the clip and grinned when he saw that she'd forgotten to load a cartridge in the chamber.

He said, "You load it like this, and this!" He drew the loading mechanism back and let it fly forward. He reached over and thrust it in the band of her shorts. "And you carry it like that, only with the safety on."

She inhaled suddenly, drawing in her abdomen, and the gun almost fell again. He patted her tummy along with the gun, and said, still grinning, "See? I mean you no harm. I had the gun. There was nothing to stop me frisking the joint and taking what I pleased. But I didn't. That's not my style. I just deal the cards straight out and play the ones on the table. That's why I'm flat broke, trying to pick up a few francs hauling your package to Mbwemo."

He remained close to her. He ran his hand up and down her arm and shoulder, not lecherously, but simply because it was good to be close to her, because she was clean, and because there was a good feel of youthful strength beneath her softness. He was again aware of her perfume, but it was different, mixed with the scent of her skin. He liked it. It made him forget why he'd come. It gave him a peculiar, unsteady feeling.

She pulled away. "No! No, please."

He took her by both arms, just below her shoulders, and half lifted her while turning her around. She was scared of him, but she was scared of something else more. She was scared of being alone, up against the jungle, up against Runkhammer, and so she didn't struggle to get away. He realized that and felt a wave of pity for her. He wanted to help her. He wanted to help her more than he wanted to collect the rest of the hundred thousand francs.

It occurred to him that that's why he was a bum. To a bum, there's always something that seems more important than money. Your successful man knows better. "Money, money, Allah, money!" Botamba had said. "With money in his purse is the most lowly a king, but broke and bankrupt does he lie in the dust as low as camel's dung." And the big black man was right.

The side of his mouth formed the words, "In this corner Jim Crawford, the Camel Dung Kid."

She whispered, trying a little to get free, "What did you say?"

"You're beautiful. My God, you're beautiful!"

She kept trying to pull away from him. "Please, monsieur! Monsieur!"

Her features seemed to be smaller when a man looked at her from close up. She'd bent her head sharply so her cheek was pressed against her shoulder. Holding her with one hand, he took her chin between his thumb and forefinger and turned it so she was looking up at him.

"Yes, you're beautiful." There wasn't any flattery in his tone. He said it because it was true.

"Please let me go." She pulled harder than before. Then she struggled with all her strength, but he held her tightly by the arms. She sobbed through clenched teeth, "What do you want?"

"You know what I want."

"Leave me alone. Is there no decency anywhere? Do white men theenk of notheeng except to take the clothes off very woman they see? Is there notheeng in any man's mind except stripping a woman and taking her to bed?"

"You're way ahead of me." His lips said it, but his eyes didn't. His eyes had stripped her naked. "Anyhow, you can't blame a man much. Inviting him to your room, and you so beautiful."

"That's not why I invited you!"

"All right. You don't need to be scared of me."

She didn't listen. She tried to get away.

"Now, calm down! Listen to me! I'll turn you loose and welcome if you promise not to go for the gun. Here, take

a deep breath. Count to ten. Think some good, wholesome thoughts. You've been associating with the wrong kind of people."

She kept on trying to twist free. She retreated, whispering, "I could keel you for that!"

They were through the arch, inside the second room. A bed was behind her. It was high canopied, surrounded by patched mosquito curtain. The backs of her legs struck the edge of it and she sat down. The netting saved her from falling on her back. She half lay, half sat, with the netting stretched tightly behind her head and shoulders.

He let her go then. She'd scratched him, and a place on his forearm was bleeding. With a handkerchief he sponged away blood while standing close enough to stop her if she made another grab for the gun.

For a few seconds neither of them spoke. The archway cast a shadow across her face. It made her skin seem dusky brown and her eyeballs very white.

The top button of her shirt had popped off. He could see one of her breasts. He'd been in Africa too long to find any novelty in seeing a woman's naked breasts. It seemed to Crawford that there was nothing indecent about a breast until they started wearing rubber ones under a sweater.

Her breast looked smaller now than had its outline beneath the shirt. He reached down, took her by the shoulder, and turned her a trifle toward the light while she stared up at him with a breathless, shot look.

He said, "You're a married woman?"

"Oui."

"You've never had any children."

"Lots of married women do not have children."

"I guess they call themselves married. They made it legal."

Her breasts were like those you'd see on a young Bantu girl in those tribes where virginity was guarded until a girl reached some maturity.

He took her hand and looked at the wedding ring. "Why are you wearing it? For protection?"

"Would it be any protection from *you?*"

He didn't answer the question. He didn't want to answer it.

He said doggedly, "You're not married."

"I am! I have a husband!"

He believed her, and believing her made him unaccountably angry. He didn't himself know why it angered him, it just did. He cried, "Well, why isn't he here?"

"You don't understand! He can't be here."

"Why?"

"Because he's ill."

"So ill he lies around Mbwemo while you go out and take his chances for him, and do his work. By the way, what is his work?"

"He's a scientist."

"Sure. He makes a science of taking stuff from Belgian territory to French without paying the duty. Let's be honest and call it smuggling."

"He's not a smuggler! Why is it you treat me this way?"

He got hold of his temper, took a deep breath, and thought about it. She was so pretty, that was the trouble. She was a knockout, and she was another man's wife. That shouldn't have stopped him, but it did. He was carrying around the Ten Commandments in latitudes that were normally considered beyond their jurisdiction. He'd tried to dump them in the past, but it was no use. A man can forget the things he's learned at thirty, but he can never escape the things that were hammered into him at the age of three, and Crawford had come from a Christian home. Five boys, all sleeping on the floor; no bathtub, no sink, no plumbing. They kept the pig in the parlor, as the saying went, but Ma had taught them that nobody but a penny-ante heel would sneak around behind a man's back and crawl in bed with his wife, which was more than you could say for some of those sanitized, college-degreed, Margaret Sangerated matrons in the brick homes up on the hill. "The craven and the damned," Ma had said, and her voice was right there with him, drowning out the boom of those native drums.

He growled, still angry, "Well, what are you and your husband doing? Hauling rough diamonds out of the Belge without paying the government royalty?"

"No, we are not, monsieur! Why do you theenk anythink like that?"

"It's *something,* or you'd have yelled to the gendarmes when Runkhammer started camping at your door."

Mention of Runkhammer brought her back to her feet. She listened, and Crawford listened, too. The wireless played softly, and the fetish drum sent its regular pulsations through the walls, but both sounds had become part of the night. Someone moved outside, and the door bolt made an almost imperceptible click. The knob hadn't moved, though. He'd been listening too hard.

He spoke: "Botamba!"

The black man answered, lips close outside the shuttered door, "Yes, bwana."

"Just stay there." He turned to her. "Where is it? Where's the package?"

A door led from the bedroom to a tiny veranda overlooking the patio, which lay in bright moonlight and shadow. It hadn't been used in a long time. There were some tables here and there, and some private dining arbors, all overgrown by vines and orchilla weed.

"There," she whispered, pointing below. "I was frightened, and last night when I thought someone was trying to get inside the room, I dropped it down there."

He could see nothing. He swung over the rail, hung by his hands, and dropped the remaining six feet to the ground. The orchilla reached to his shoulders. He forked his way through it, dreading the thought of mambas, and found a padded object. It was a bundle wrapped in brown, waterproofed duck. He lifted it. It was about four feet high, had a diameter of eighteen inches, and weighed about forty pounds. He squeezed it between his hands, trying to guess its contents. It could have been filled with thatch inside its thickly quilted wrapping. He examined the top fastenings. The knots had been thickly daubed with sealing wax.

She whispered from above, "Don't open it!"

"Anything you say." He lifted it overhead. "Here!"

"No! Leave it there. No need of bringing it to the room. You'll have to get it out without his knowing."

"Quit worrying about Runkhammer. I'll take care of Runkhammer. You've forgotten something else." He put the package back, got a handhold on a lattice, pulled himself up, found the veranda rail, and was back beside her. "That little matter of twenty-five thousand francs."

"You could trust me."

"Yeah, I could, but that's not my policy. The jungle has a way of hiding people so you never see 'em again."

She bent over and fumbled inside her shirt. Instead of the bank notes he expected, she handed him a small handful of coins. They were gold 250-escudo pieces, the first he'd seen in years.

He showed surprise in the jerk of his shoulders as he laughed. "What the devil! Have you turned up the Katabas treasure?"

"They're genuine, monsieur!"

"Why, sure. I got nothing against gold." They felt heavy and good in his hand. He counted eleven of them, did some mental arithmetic, multiplying their eighteen-gram weight against the latest London gold quotation, and decided he had considerably the best of it. "All right, this makes half. The other half comes from your husband in Mbwemo, right?"

"Yes."

"How about you? You're not staying here?"

"I don't know. I don't dare leave. He'll follow me. If I stay here, maybe he'll stay, too. The only theeng is the package. That is all that matters."

"It's not the only thing that matters to *me*. I'm not leaving you here with Runkhammer, either."

She tried to turn him by his arm. "Go!"

"Sure. Me and you. I'll deliver you to the Doctor along with the package. Two for the price of one. And both untampered with. I swear it. I swear it by the noble shrines of East St. Louis!"

Chapter Five

CRAWFORD opened the veranda door. He spoke quietly: "Botamba!"

The big native exhaled as though he'd been holding his breath ever since Crawford first went inside. "Ah, bwana!"

"The Hammer been up?"

"I heard nothing."

The Dutchman had twisted almost out of his chair to listen. Crawford, speaking just under Botamba's ear, said, "I'll bring you the package. We'll leave the way we came."

Botamba's muscles solidified. "The *front* way? Bwana, that Runkhammer will be waiting, and—"

"Well, let him wait and to hell with him."

He moved back inside and closed the door. Chari Douval had been listening. He could feel her tenseness as she whispered, "What are you doing now?"

"Like I said, I'm taking you and the package through to Mbwemo. I think we'd better bring it here to the room after all. Come along and I'll hand it up to you."

Once again he dropped to the patio and hunted through the orchilla for the bundle. He lifted it high and she pulled it the rest of the way by one of its rope handles, then he clambered quickly up beside her.

She whispered, "I cannot go weethout packing my things."

"Well, pack 'em." He found a chair, sat down, and lighted a cigarette. "Go ahead and turn on the light."

"No." She hurried in the dark, opening drawers, hunting through a tiny closet. She ran against the washstand, and the brass pitcher fell to the matting with a splash of water. She cursed in French, and Crawford laughed.

"Don't hurry, but just take what you need. I have an outfit. Grab some extra socks and a powder puff. *And* the Browning. You'll need that Browning to keep Ed Foley away."

She laughed nervously. He could hear her rapid breathing as she worked.

He asked, "What are you packing it in—a little portmanteau?"

"No. What you English call billy bag."

"I'm Irish."

"Is there deeference?"

"You're damned betcha there's a difference." She was trying to buckle the thing and having a hard time. He groped and took it from her. "Here, before you teach me some new words."

Packed, the billy bag weighed only ten or twelve pounds. He carried both it and the package.

He said, "You do have the Browning? Well, don't draw it. Keep it in the holster." He had an idea she was too excited to understand the meaning of his words. "Are you listening to me?"

"Oui!" she whispered fiercely.

He laughed to quiet her. The laugh seemed loud after their low-voiced conversation. It bounded back from the close walls of the room. "You know what Jesse James said —'Don't draw unless you shoot, and don't shoot unless you shoot to kill.' You've heard of Jesse James, haven't you? He was president of Kansas City before Pendergast took over. Jesse had the economy administration. Now, take a deep breath. That's it, a real deep one, and open the door for me. We'll get out of here all right."

She fumbled with the catch and went out ahead of him. She didn't realize the Dutchman was there in the siesta chair until she ran against him.

He got quickly to his feet, embarrassed that she'd found him in no clothes except his underwear shorts, and said, *"Ach, mevrouw!"*

Crawford got her aside and leaned to whisper in the Dutchman's ear, "Don't say anything. We're eloping and we wouldn't want her husband to know. When we get to Chicago I'll look up your cousin, the watchmaker."

"*Ja!* Wait! Mynheer, if you are sick—"

"I'll make it." The Dutchman had confused "eloping"

with the Dutch *ellending,* and thought someone was ill. "It's just my old gallstones, and I have some Tums along."

"Ja. Goot. Vaarwel."

Crawford led the way down the veranda and stopped when he turned the corner. At his right, through a break in the vines, he could look across town and see the roofs of some palm-nut storehouses. In one of them, the abandoned Franconi, Ed Foley should be waiting.

The tom-tom had stopped beating, the wireless had faded, the bar was closed. It was so quiet he could hear the regular thudding of the petrol engine in the powerhouse down by the river. Far, far off, filtered by distance, came the claxon sound of a boat whistle. His eyes swept the Congo, a wide expanse with a thin night mist that obliterated its far shore, making it look oceanic. A pin point of light crept slowly. It was the searchlight of a tug, one of the never ending barge outfits loaded with blister copper from the smelters of Katanga.

The moon had been bright. Suddenly it was covered by cloud. Wind sprang up. The wind came in a series of gusts with a smell of swamp, roaring in the thatch eaves above their heads. It was dark, and the darkness had a peculiar quality as if the shadows of the jungle had moved in and sponged up the petty glow of those electric bulbs still burning. Even the tug's light, swinging in a ninety-degree arc to locate the channel stakes, had disappeared.

The new darkness had made Crawford once more alter his course. He started to grope through vines, and said, "There's a stairway here, if I can find it."

Long unused, the side stairs were overgrown all the way to the bottom. One of the steps crumbled and he went through to his thigh. He saved himself by thrusting his free leg straight forward and ramming the vine tangle with his opposite elbow.

Unable to move, he hissed to Botamba, "Give me a hand, you dumb rhino! Here, take the billy bag."

Getting up, he guided Chari across the missing step to the bottom. It was good to get out in the open with the earth underfoot. He took off his topee so the wind could

blow through his sweaty hair and drew a deep breath. "Where'd you leave the uniform can?" he asked Botamba.

"Near the front pathway."

"Get it."

The big man did not move. He whispered with a white roll of his eyeballs, "You mean go *alone*?"

"Yes, alone. What kind of a damned pukka Moslem are you, losing your guts in the dark because of that Christian Runkhammer?"

"He is not a Christian. He is reborn of the devil. He rose from hell with a bullet in his heart."

Botamba kept muttering deep in his throat as he moved away, drawing a machete big as a scimitar from beneath the folds of his *kuftan.*

Crawford waited. The girl stood close. She held to his shirt. She clutched it tightly. He could feel the warm press of her shoulder. It was good to have her there, needing him. He felt like primeval man leading his mate through a wilderness.

"Why are you laughing?" she asked in an agitated whisper, close to his ear.

He hadn't laughed aloud. It had been only a silent jerk of his shoulders, but standing close she'd felt it.

He said, "It was nothing. Believe me, nothing."

The bar was on that side of the building. It was closed, with a peanut electric bulb left burning over the cash register—a big, crank-up affair with banks of keys like a pipe organ. Other lights were on, deep inside the building, but scarcely a ray reached through the screens, jalousies, and vines.

The wind, rising, tore scraps of thatch from the roof and hurled them away. Shrubs and trees were lashed and bent double. After what seemed to be a long wait, Botamba returned amid the billow of his *kuftan,* the uniform can balanced on his head.

Crawford spoke close to Botamba's ear: "Front way. Down the street. Ed's at the Franconi storehouse."

Botamba started along the cobbled path. Crawford, suddenly realizing that someone was on the veranda di-

rectly above, seized his arm and dragged him back. At the same instant the darkness was knifed by the white ray of an electric torch.

The beam swung over them, out along the cobbled path, and came back again. It swept back and forth across the yard. Crawford drew the Mauser and snapped the safety off. He backed into the open. He had an impression of the man behind the light without being sure it was Runkhammer. He resisted the temptation to shoot at the light and spoke through his teeth:

"This way!"

The light moved downward, catching them in its oval. It reflected briefly off the Mauser, and blinked off.

A gun exploded with a bite of powder flame through the vines. Crawford, now at a half run, rammed the girl out of his way and fired back.

Darkness was torn by the sudden exchange. There were four shots, two from each gun, so close together that a single second would have blanketed them all.

Crawford ran, leaning into the wind, trying to locate Chari Douval. He spoke her name, and she answered. She had stopped and turned with the Browning drawn.

He grabbed her wrist and said, "Put it away. It'll only tell him which way we've gone. And those damned militiamen . . ."

Rain came, a wall of it carried by the wind. They walked, bending into the deluge. Cobbles underfoot served to guide them across the compound, through the front gate. They crossed the street through an inch of water and stopped in the center grove of raphia trees.

The wind was gone, roaring through the jungle, leaving the rain to fall in a vertical deluge so thick that one could not get air in his lungs without a mixture of water. A glow came through the overcast, very slight, but sufficient to reveal the larger outlines of the town around them. The repeated shrill of a police whistle and excited native voices told them that the gendarmes were out hunting the hotel grounds.

"Don't run," Crawford said, getting hold of Botamba's

arm. "Just walk. Gendarmes are the same everywhere. They can't resist a running target."

In another five minutes the rain had diminished to a fine mist. It was lake all around them. They splashed down the lorry road, turned up a side road guided by a double line of monkey-bread trees, and came up to the open doors of a storehouse.

Crawford wasn't sure it was the Franconi. Everything looked different, rising from water. Inside it was hot. The air was vile from the rancid odor of old palm nuts.

He called into the darkness, "Eddie!" and heard the relieved tones of Ed Foley's voice scarcely half a dozen steps away.

"Crawford? Everything all right? What was that shooting? He didn't get the money away from you, did he?"

Crawford laughed from the side of his mouth. "Why, Ed, your solicitude is more than I can stand. I might be hit and bleeding my sweet life away, but you wouldn't worry about a thing like that. Oh, no. To hell with your friends, your own countrymen. All you worry about is a few lousy francs."

"Aye, Allah!" Botamba chanted. "To the jingle of dollars do all gates open before thee, even the gate unto the sultan's harem, but broke and bankrupt do we lie low as camel's dung in the road."

Chapter Six

WITH gendarmes prowling the town, Crawford hunted an out-of-the-way route among native huts, through yam fields and plantain orchards, until he located the northward footpath, ancient route of the Arab traders from Bhar el Ghazal.

The path was a dark tunnel through jungle, not wide enough for two abreast, crooked in an apparently aimless manner. After an hour of groping that took them no more than a single kilometer, they came to a little clearing where the moon slanted in, revealing a group of fetishers' huts that were used in seasonal rituals, now abandoned.

Crawford seated himself cross-legged on some weathered palm mats with his back against a spongewood spirit pole carved to the top with images, all of them uglier than he was. He placed a cigarette in one side of his mouth and grinned from the other. "Sit down, kid," he said to Chari Douval. "Those gendarmes won't follow us. We're in the clear all the way to Mbwemo."

"How about thees Runkhammer?"

"Hell's full of Runkhammers." He tried to strike a match, but the top of his chemi-dry container had been loose and the heads crumbled one after another from dampness.

Ed Foley, standing above him, said, "I'll take my end of the money you collected."

Crawford pretended not to hear him. He tore the wrapper off his unlighted cigarette and stuffed the tobacco under his lower lip like snuff.

Eddie repeated, raising his voice, "I'll take my end of that money now."

"You'll get it when you need it, Eddie me boy. I'm saving your money so I can ship you back to Baltimore."

"It's mine and I'll take it now."

"The hell you will."

Crawford, after counting his cigarettes and thinking it over, passed one to Chari.

"I smoke too," Ed Foley said.

"Didn't you buy any tobacco? I told you to lay in some supplies at the trade store before you cached yourself at the warehouse. Didn't you do it?"

"I got some tobacco, only I don't want to untie the package."

Crawford gave him one. Ed had his petrol lighter out, snapping it. On the eighth or ninth try he got an unwilling flame. He lighted Chari's cigarette and then his own. He spoke from the side of his mouth to her:

"How much money did you pay him?"

She told him, after shooting Crawford a half-frightened glance.

Eddie said, "Escudo pieces! You mean gold?"

Still watching Crawford, she nodded.

Ed cried, "Then I'll expect gold from you, and none of this lousy colonial paper. Come on and shell out." He didn't expect the money, and he showed it when he went on talking to Chari without waiting. "I was a fool to send him for you. I should have left him steeped in cheap cognac at that river-front dive. You can see the sort of character he is." He linked arms with her. He made it look brotherly. With a shrug of her supple body she tried to pull away, but he kept her arm and said, "Remember, when you asked Madame Levasseur for a trustworthy man, *I'm* the one she sent."

Crawford said, "Get your hands off her." He looked at the bundles they'd been carrying—tent, hammocks, blankets, and food. "Those our supplies? It looks like no more'n I came in with. What did you buy?"

"Oh, a few things."

"Exactly what?"

"Couple liters of whisky. Some cigarettes."

Crawford cursed him in several dialects. "Whisky and cigarettes for a five-day trip through this sinkhole jungle? Why, you rum-dumb, fiddle-playing tropical tramp. I should wring your rooster neck."

"You unbeliever," intoned Botamba. "You swine. You Christian."

"Keep quiet," Crawford said. Then back to Eddie, "Didn't you pick up any bully beef at the store?"

"How did I know you intended to go through this Mengtabba country? I didn't think anybody was that crazy. I thought you'd take the stern-wheeler, or maybe wait for a plane. Those Mengtabbas are mean. They're cannibals."

"Oh, hell, Eddie, the only time they eat human flesh is at the feast of the Kuva fetish, and that doesn't come around until the end of the dry season. Besides, the head chief is a friend of mine. I gave him a British double rifle, genuine Powell four-seventy caliber. I figure he'll supply us with porters at least as far as Loandu Falls."

Botamba said, "The rifle had a bend in the barrel so that thou thyself said it would blow the head off the first who shot it."

"He got it for nothing, didn't he? What in hell does he expect for nothing? Anyhow, if it blew his head off he won't be around to hold it against us."

With the stars fading on the approach of dawn, they went on along the tunneling footpath. It was low-lying country of only moderate fertility. Vegetation was dense, but there were few great trees. It was true bush, monotonous and depressing. Sometimes, from above, would dangle a blaze of orchids, unreal in their crepe-paper colors, gaudy, ugly. Other blooms were hidden and pale. There were few animals, but insects were legion. Ants traveled in armies that trod little U-shaped troughs in the ground. In the air flies veered and swarmed. Leeches waited on leaves and tendrils overhanging the trail to drop on the first tremble of contact. They were of many varieties. There were leeches that took blood as stealthily as vampire bats, and those that bit and burned like white-hot needles. It was no country for a white man, or for a black man. It was a miasma-ridden sinkhole country, the rump end of the universe.

At midmorning the footpath emerged from shadow

into blazing sun, crossed through spear and cane grass so high even Botamba could not look over it, and entered a swamp. The swamp trees were bulbous and truncated. Water weed had grown in masses that often concealed the water and had a consistency that supported the weight of a man. Sapling trunks had been laid end to end as a footway. Many of the saplings had become water-logged and rested beneath the surface covered by green scum as slick as gelatine; others, no thicker through than a man's arm, dipped and turned as one stepped on them. Botamba, barefoot, negotiated the treacherous passage native style, taking rapid, jiggly steps. It was slower for the others. Crawford and Ed Foley both wet themselves to their knees. Chari walked the saplings skillfully until she began to tire, then she fell repeatedly, and when they paused on higher ground for siesta through the hot hours she was soaked to the waist.

She kept looking down at herself and laughing. She was flushed. One could see it despite the dark pigmentation of her skin. A strange agitation filled her. She kept repeating in French, "Can't you *see* me going out on the hotel terrace like this?"

Crawford decided she'd been too long without sleep. It wasn't good to take liquor in the middle of the day, but he mixed her a couple of ounces with water and honey.

The drink seemed to quiet her. She had fresh socks in her billy bag, but no shorts. They turned their backs while she changed to an extra pair of Crawford's, so big they fell below her knees and fitted around her waist with big folds. Toward evening, after traveling more long kilometers, she got to laughing at her appearance. The flush again appeared, and there was an unsteady note in her laughter.

"The Doctor, I can hear heem! 'My dear, where did you get the shorts?' he will say. 'From a man,' I will say. 'From a Yankee. We traded pants in the jungle.' I can see his face when I tell heem. He will be furious. He will challenge you to a duel. Oh, he is not young, perhaps, but he is jealous. And he is no coward."

"Yeah," said Crawford, with a vinegar twist to his lips. He paused at a widening of the footpath where a fragment of white sky could be seen through a break in the leaves and watched her as she pulled on the shorts and sucked in her abdomen and laughed. The flush beneath her dark skin and the slightly insane flash in her eyes made her extremely pretty.

" 'I sent you out in a dress,' he will say. 'What poor stick of a wife have you become?' he will say."

Crawford growled, "What kind of a husband would lie around and let his wife tramp through the bush in this kind of company?"

He had growled it from the side of his mouth, not intending for her to hear, but her senses had become extremely acute. Her manner suddenly changed and she was feline in her anger: "You suggest he's a coward? No! He is not well! That is why he sent me weeth the package. You have heard of the spirillum fever? He had that. His hearing, his eyes, his sense of balance—all hurt. But he is not a coward!"

"All right, forget it." He could see by an artery in her throat how rapid her pulse was. "How do you feel? Thirsty?"

She whispered, "He fool them! Yes, monsieurs, he fool them! All of them! He left, knowing they would follow—but when they caught up weeth heem, did he have the package? No. No, I had it. So you see, it was he who took the chance. He is not a coward."

"Runkhammer? He the one that followed?"

"Eh? Perhaps." She shrugged, as was her habit, by lifting one shoulder and dropping the other. "Now you try to make me talk."

"Runkhammer and who else?"

"See, you try to make me talk. But it is no use. I have talk too much already."

While pouring her a drink of water, he asked, "Been taking your quinine?"

"The Doctor does not believe in quinine. If you keep taking it, after a while the quinine is worse than malaria.

So he says. Anyway, I do not catch. I am like native. I have live with the fevers all my life."

"Just the same, I'm giving you twenty grains of quinine."

"Just the same, you are not!"

He didn't argue with her. He could do that later. He wanted to reach the Mengtabba village before sunset. They climbed gradually from swamp to a country of larger forest and more fertile soil. They crossed clearings, hummocky from the recent work of cassava diggers. A message drum started to beat with a peculiar, liquid, rocking sound peculiarly like the speech of man.

"Understand it?" Crawford asked Botamba.

"No, bwana. The tongue is strange to me." Then with rolling eyeballs, "Mengtabba?"

"Of course. The village is just ahead."

He cried out, "O Master, when they see it is us, the givers of the crooked-barreled gun, they will roast our bodies like pork at the wedding of an infidel."

Crawford laughed and kept going. The path, which had been scarcely wide enough for a single person, now widened so he could drop back and walk beside the girl. She had a touch of fever, but it didn't look like malaria. She'd had no chill, no chattering teeth even after he'd given her the whisky.

He said, "Ever feel like you're going sun-blind? Get a flickering before your eyes when you bend over and stand up?"

"I'm all right! How many times do I have to tell you I'm all right?"

A message drum came to life behind them. There was a clearing with some ruined huts. The jungle closed in again and opened again. They crossed scabby yam and kafir gardens, passed through a grove of some huge old *bokongu* trees, and were at last in the Mengtabba village, hit by the stenches of goats and humanity.

Everyone was out, long warned by the drums. Children followed them, all jabbering at once, sticking their abdomens forward as if proudly to show their finger lengths

of umbilical cord as proof that they were safely beyond the government midwife project. Women followed, too, as did lesser men of the tribe, and slaves with ugly puckered brands on their shoulders.

Although a short people, the Mengtabbas were well built, with a dignity that one did not always find among tribesmen more willing to knuckle under to colonial authority. Men and older women were garbed in robes and loin pieces of bark cloth or bedraggled trade calico, but the boys, and those girls as yet unmarried, were naked.

The village itself consisted of about forty huts of mud brick and thatch, stretched in a hit-or-miss double line along the path, overhung by giant *bokongus,* which protected them from the rains. About a hundred feet away were some dome-roofed fetish huts, a dancing area, and an assortment of tree-trunk drums. Eighteen or twenty warriors had formed a group and were hopping around impatiently while tom-toms were being dragged from one of the huts. Unlike the women, who were unblemished, the warriors practiced welt-scarring, which made their faces look broad, bloated, and ugly. As Crawford and the others approached, they commenced beating assagais and arrows against their elephant-hide shields, chanting, *"Ke ya-ya! Ke ya-ya!"* in a rhythm like an agitated waltz.

"You see?" Crawford growled over his shoulder to Botamba. "They haven't got the salt and pepper out. Why, you'd think we were the DiMaggio boys coming home to San Francisco."

He walked with his shoulders back. All slouch and sign of fatigue had left him. He strode straight and arrogant, looking to neither right nor left, with the manner of a man who'd spent enough years in the black heart of Africa to know that civilization is a thin veneer along the tourist routes, that white men are few and generally hated, and that it's all up with them once the natives learn that they get tired, and feel fear, and bleed the same red as other men.

The chief's house, somewhat removed from the others,

rose in triple mat-and-slat cones from a mud-brick base. Seven or eight slaves of some bandy-legged tribe were dashing around, getting a *tepoi* ready.

Crawford shortened his stride, giving the chief time to come from his hut and squat beneath the awning of the *tepoi*. After considerable tilting and straining he was lifted on the shoulders of eight men. The chief was quite fat, blacker than most Mengtabbas, his skin glistening from a fresh application of oil. The oil had *bowane* and civet mixed with it for perfume, and they got the vile smell of it while he was still some distance away. Behind him came the straggling column of his royal court—fetishers in goat-hide masks bearing spirit sticks adangle with grigri amulets, and old men and warriors carrying native weapons and rifles of ancient vintage. Walking beside the *tepoi* was a magnificently powerful warrior proudly bearing the British double gun.

Still speaking from the side of his mouth, without turning his head, Crawford said, "It didn't blow up. It didn't even split the barrels. It's just the ticket for bush like this. They can shoot around the bends in the path."

He borrowed Ed Foley's cigarette lighter, and, alone with the chief inside the twilight of the big house, presented it to him as a gift. The chief was delighted, even though it refused to light. As he snapped it and made sounds like a small child, Crawford asked for and obtained half a dozen chickens, a quantity of native meal, and use of porters to the bridge at Loandu Falls. When he emerged it was twilight with the smoke of cook fires giving the shadows a purplish cast. Botamba had already pitched the brown silk tent, and he found Chari inside, huddled on a blanket on the ground.

"You know better than to leave her like that," he said to Ed Foley. "Get the hammock up."

"Try and reason with her yourself." Foley was in poor shape to travel. He was prostrated by fatigue; he needed a drink, but Crawford had locked the whisky in the uniform can and Botamba had refused to produce the key. He cried petulantly, "Where's my lighter?"

"Chief's got it." He said to Botamba, "Put the hammock inside." Then back to Foley, "Yes, you lousy ten-franc, trumpet-tooting tramp, the chief's got it. You're using my outfit, aren't you? You got to stand some of the expense. I'm fed up with your sponging off me."

Eddie shouted back, "Who was flat on his big broad behind when I picked him up in Bakoville, you or me?"

"*Financially* I was flat, but I had the guts to face Runkhammer."

"To hell with you. I wish you were back in East St. Louis. I wish you were across the river in Sportsman's Park, sitting there all alone watching those bumbling Browns play."

Crawford grinned from the side of his mouth, looking once more like a good-natured devil-god in a Hindu temple. "Yeah, the Browns. They're for me. I like to pull for the underdog, and the Browns are two dogs under the underdog. When I was a kid, Eddie, I used to go out and watch Sisler play. He was the greatest hitter that ever lived. I wouldn't have traded him for Cobb or Ruth, either one. The Browns used to win ball games in those days, and I'm not one to go back on his team just because of a fifteen-year losing streak."

He went inside the tent and stood with his head and shoulders bent to the slanting roof, looking down on Chari Douval. He could just make out her face in the dimness. She was pretty—aye, Allah, she was pretty! Not snub-nosed, pink and white, blonde-bunny pretty. Pretty wasn't even the right word. She was beautiful in a classic manner, like the Greek statues he had seen lying around in the sand while that gang from Harvard University was excavating Meshrak. Her eyes, wide open, looked at him from the shadow, dark and soft as the eyes of an okapi.

He got down on one knee, felt along her hot wrist, and took her pulse. It was quite rapid, between 120 and 130, although he couldn't be certain, as it was too dark to read the second hand of his watch.

He kept hold of her wrist long after there was any necessity for it. Seeing her helpless and so small, he felt

shame for the way he had treated her in the hotel room at Bakoville.

"You theenk I am ill?" she asked.

"You got a little touch of something." His voice, when he wanted it so, could be very gentle. "Sure you've never had malaria?"

"Perhaps, when I was a small girl."

From the uniform can he took two ten-grain quinine tablets, one sulfadiazine, and a spoonful of bicarbonate, which he stirred in a big cupful of boiled water. She took the pills and drank soda water until the quantity of it gagged her. Then he helped her into the hammock, where she fell asleep. Outside, amid the odors of scorched flesh, Botamba and Ed Foley were broiling chickens over coals.

"How is she?" Eddie asked.

"Fever. What a hell of a place to come down with fever! I wonder if we ought to turn back."

He walked to the package and looked at it. He put his toe under it and turned it over. He had carried it most of the day, but he hadn't bothered before to examine it. He noticed that the canvas, after its tar treatment, had been dipped in antelope tallow. A complicated criss-crossing of knotted ropes bound it, making it look to the casual observer as if it had been wrapped in fish net. Each knot, and there were about twenty of them, had been daubed with sealing wax. He got the package close to the fire for a good look at them. Each dab of wax bore the impression of a Roman D. Douval had used his signet ring.

"Want to peep inside?" he asked, grinning up at Ed Foley.

"Sure." He saw that Crawford didn't really mean it and said, "Wait, Jim. What harm could it do? She wouldn't—"

"It would do this much harm—Douval would know it had been tampered with, and there'd go the last half of our pay, blooie, like that."

"It might be full of diamonds."

"It might be full of black spiders carrying the plague. Anyhow, Eddie, I wouldn't double-cross her."

Chapter Seven

CRAWFORD sat inside the tent listening to tom-toms and the cries of native dancers as they invoked the power of the *fa* at a fire near the fetish huts. From the hammock by his shoulder he was steadily conscious of the girl's rapid breathing. At midnight he roused to give her more sulfa. When he awoke at dawn, her eyes were already open and she seemed to be back to normal.

She said, "Have you been there all night?"

"Yeah." Nights, even in the Congo, could lay a chill in your bones. He stretched and shuddered and rubbed his fingers through his hair. "Thirsty?"

"But I am not seek. You are a good doctor."

"I'm not one of your cheap, ten-franc quacks. I'm a first-class quack. The difference between me and a lot of sawbones is that I'll admit it. Take sulfa and quinine away from most of those back-country Mayos and all they'd have left would be a Latin dictionary and three colors of aspirin. Here, let's see if you can stand up."

She got outside holding to his arm.

He said, "I think we'd better turn around and head for Bakoville. It'll be four days to Mbwemo, through bad country. Three days at best. No place to have a bout with fever."

She cried furiously, "We are taking the package through to Mbwemo!"

"What's a week more or less? Girl, this is the Congo. This is the land where time stands still."

"Anyway, I am not seek. You see, I stand weethout trembling. See me walk! See, monsieurs. I lied to you last night. I have had malaria—a leetle. An hour or two of fever, and then poof, it is gone."

Malaria sometimes acted that way, and she seemed to be strong enough.

"Have some breakfast," he said.

She ate well, and there was still no sign of fever. It might recur with fatigue later in the day, but sulfa and quinine had probably got her over the hump.

"All right, darling," he said, grinning like a gargoyle, patting her shoulder. "You'll go to Mbwemo, but you'll go in style—in a *tepoi*."

He secured the *tepoi*, erected a reclining back rest with a sunshade over it, and hired four additional porters to carry it. She was not a difficult load, and they set off swiftly, carrying the burden on their shoulders at a half trot, rest, and half trot again.

The message drum and other message drums followed them, telegraphing their progress through the jungle. At siesta they reached another Mengtabba village. It was smaller and dirtier than the first. It lay in a paralysis of heat. Natives squatted on their heel bones and peered from huts. Chickens, the scrawny birds of the tropics, lay in the dusty shade with their bills open, panting.

They rested beneath the broad-leafed shade of some banana trees, and went on as soon as the day's most brutal heat had passed. They reached the Efunta, a brownish stream, warm as blood. Its mud bars were covered by crocodiles, great loathsome creatures, drugged by heat. There was a bridge of bamboo-bundle pontoons fastened one to the other by grass ropes. Rain fell in a warm deluge and kept dripping from the thick overhead mat of foliage long after the sun came out.

Fever had once again settled on the girl. Her cheeks burned, her hands were sweaty and cold. She seemed to be conscious, but her speech lacked coherency when Crawford tried to talk with her. That evening it was necessary to force her mouth open before she would accept sulfa and quinine.

"Aye, aye, blackwater!" Botamba chanted with his eyes rolled back inside his skull. "Aye, she will die despite thy pills, O bwana."

"No, she doesn't have blackwater fever!" Crawford shouted.

He took her pulse. It was about 140. He ate a little and

sat beside her, listening to her wild talk as she tossed in the hammock. It was filled with names he'd never heard before—Willa, Clifton, Aggamba.

"Package!" Crawford said. It was a lousy trick, but he listened for her response. "Package," he repeated. "Tell me what's in the package."

"La fleur de—" and she said some French words he could not catch. Then she said, "Odysseus. Edmond, who is Odysseus?"

Later, squatting by the fire, drinking a cup of sirupy extract coffee, Crawford said, "Eddie, you had a year in college—who was Odysseus?"

"You ought to know that. He played second base for the Cubs."

Crawford cursed him and went inside the tent to sleep.

He awoke suddenly thinking he was late with the sulfa, but he lit a match and saw he was almost exactly on the minute. She was no better in the morning, but they went on, over rolling hills, through a towering forest, across savanna. Next morning they reached the deep cut of the Loandu River and heard the distant roar of the falls.

The Loandu was swift with a channel sliced by crags that would have shattered any canoe that braved it, but a means of crossing was afforded by a pigmy toll bridge, a narrow footway of ropes anchored to huge trees.

They entered the village amid the soft thudding of a drum and were met by the pigmy chief, a knobby-muscled old man whose head reached barely to Crawford's breastbone. They haggled in a jargon that was itself the crossroads of all Africa, arriving at a price of fifty francs. When it was paid over, the last copper coin of it, a rope and bamboo ladder was let down from a landing about forty feet up in the main anchor tree, and when the Mengtabbas refused to go farther, the pygmies, carrying on a constant chatter unseen in the leafy bowers, commenced drawing up the outfit by means of ropes.

Crawford looked at the girl asleep in the *tepoi* and said, "We'll have to knock that thing down, or build another on the far side."

Eddie asked, "How you getting her across?"

"On my back."

"Holy hell! And how do we get her to Mbwemo?"

"There's a village of fishermen about twelve kilos downriver, and from there we can get paddle boys to run us down to St. Peter's. I don't know what we'll find there. Anyhow, they should have an infirmary."

Crawford carried her by means of a rope sling on his back. She awoke and fought with Eddie as he got her legs through the stirrup loops, but she was asleep again with her chin over Crawford's shoulder as he slowly ascended the ladder, and the next and the next, until he reached the bridge landing.

The landing was a platform scarcely a meter square, without a railing, an eagle's perch. Below and away he could look across river and forest dissolving in purple mist. A sway of the tree gave him a momentary drunken feeling so that he staggered and needed the trunk behind him for support. At that second Chari awakened and sucked in her breath in sudden terror.

He laughed and said, trying to sound relaxed, "It's no nightmare. This is the high bridge at Loandu. Stanley wrote about it, but it's a lot older than Stanley. This thing was here when Caesar was chasing Cleopatra, or was it the other way around? If you're nervous, close your eyes. I'll get you across all right."

He didn't know if she heard him, but her arms, hot from fever, seemed to press harder on his neck.

Botamba was returning along the bobbing suspension bridge for his next load of supplies. Crawford had to wait for him. Trying to pass on the narrow footway would be too dangerous. It was a series of bamboo rounds knotted into grass rope, and no more than fourteen inches wide.

Pigmies who were at work weaving new strands into the ropes kept scurrying ahead of Botamba, getting handholds and dropping at the final instant to dangle over the abyss as fearless as the monkeys that they resembled. Botamba paid not the slightest heed even when they seemed ready to tangle his feet.

"O Master," he said, coming up the steep pitch to the landing, "be careful, for one misstep will plunge thee into those crags below, and then who would pay me my eighteen months in back wages? Aye, Master, thou art in double danger with the young mamma on thy back. Let me carry her, or better still, let me carry thy purse until we are safely on the other side."

Crawford cursed him and walked out across the abyss. There were hand ropes on both sides. He had hold of them. The bridge swayed. It seemed to veer from under his feet. He momentarily lost the feel of gravity. He had a sense of being overbalanced by the weight of the girl. It tied knots in his intestines. He forced himself to keep walking. The bridge swung in the other direction, and the unsteady feeling was less. He fell into its rhythm. The sway became almost pleasant. It had a hypnotic effect, like the swing of a hammock. He watched the river depths appear first on one side and then on the other. The girl pressed him tightly. She didn't move. She didn't seem to breathe. Nothing now disturbed his equilibrium, not even the jiggly movements of the pigmy repair gang that scampered to make way for him.

In the middle he was no more than a hundred feet above the water. From there it took more effort to walk as the bridge climbed steeper and steeper to the far landing.

They had siesta on the far side. Chari would not awaken for medicine. They had to force her mouth open and hold her nostrils to give it to her. Afterward she fell into a rigid sleep. Her condition might have been described as coma.

They reassembled the *tepoi* and took turns, two carrying and one resting, along a crooked bluff trail slippery with spray from Loandu Falls. Several kilometers of roaring water lay below. At night they reached a village of huts on stilts in the shoal current of the river.

Crawford traded a machete and some trinkets for one of the huts, and had it cleaned and spread with new mattings. He hung the hammock, stretched netting around it, and carried Chari up the ladder.

She hadn't moved since siesta. Her clothes were sweaty, wrinkled, and matted with dirt. He hired a couple of native women to undress her, bathe her, and see to it that some punkahs were kept going. Then, ill tempered from fatigue, he found his blankets and slept.

It was morning when he returned. The hut looked different. It had a bright amber and green look with the sun slanting through the openings in the wall mats. One of the native women was cross-legged on the floor, burning twigs in the flame of a hippo-oil lamp. On the other side of the room a boy of twelve or fourteen squatted on his long heel bones waving a two-ended punkah of copal-cured palm leaves.

The burning stuff had an odor not unlike sandalwood; actually it was jackass cinnamon, which was popularly accepted as a purgative against the djin of the devil.

He didn't stop her from burning it. He laid a copper franc piece on her knee and another on the knee of the boy, and stood for several minutes looking through the mosquito net at Chari Douval.

She lay on her back, her arms over the sides of the hammock almost on the floor. She was naked. He could see now how thin she was. She had never weighed more than 105 pounds, and fever had taken her down until she was well below one hundred. He could see the center bone of her chest between her widely set breasts. Her hipbones were sharp ridges with deep hollows next to the small, round globe of her abdomen.

He picked up a strip of bark cloth, opened the netting, and laid it across her loins. The native woman stared at him with the surprise of most primitives when they see one who thinks the form of creation is indecent.

He took her pulse. Her fever had broken. Her skin was not hot or dry or clammy. It was once again pleasant to touch. He felt like laughing and crying and getting drunk. It was the first he'd realized how worried he had been.

Chapter Eight

ALTHOUGH it was past time for her medicine, he did not awaken her. Finally he noticed that her eyes were open.

"Where am I?" she asked, and turned around in the hammock. She noticed then that she was naked and tried to cover herself.

He laughed and said, "What's another naked woman in Africa? I've looked at so many of 'em in the last ten years I'd rather look at a horse." Then he answered her question: "We're in a native village on the Loandu."

"We have been here how long?"

"Since last night."

"Monsieur, we must get to Mbwemo tomorrow!"

"Not a chance. You're in no shape to travel, and if you were I wouldn't take you to Mbwemo, but downriver to St. Peter's. From there, after you rest up, you'll be able to catch a stern-wheeler down to Fort Suvo, or if you're lucky one of those puddle-hopping pilots can fly you straight across without going to Suvo at all."

Holding the bark cloth in front of her, she sat up and groped for the opening in the nettings. "We must get the package there!"

"It'll keep."

"Eet will *not* keep!"

"What you got in it, ice cream?"

"Remember the agreement—in five days to Mbwemo! Otherwise the other feefty thousand francs will not be paid."

She managed to get through the nettings, but, no longer holding to them, she almost fell. He picked her up and laid her back in the hammock. She seemed to sleep for a while, and when she awoke again he gave her the medicine. Next morning he hired a crew of paddleboys, who, in slim dugout canoes, took them down the treacherous

current to St. Peter's Mission, an Episcopal establishment situated at the head of steam navigation from the Bomu. There was no doctor, but the missionaries, a British-trained Negro and his wife, took Chari into their home, promising to send her to Suvo as soon as the supply launch came on its regular fortnightly trip, probably at the end of that week. At dawn, guided by three young Mengbettu boys from the mission, Crawford, Foley, and Botamba struck out along a northeastward-trending foot-path for Mbwemo.

They camped that night without sighting Bomu River. Next day it rained. They were slowed by mud and sodden bush. That night, with rain drumming on the fly of his tent, Crawford called his guides over, gave them a tongue lashing, and won from them the admission that they had never been to Mbwemo, that they had only the most vague idea of its location, and had volunteered only to go along and enjoy a holiday in the city.

On the third day, trusting to compass bearings, they reached a stream whose size indicated that it was probably the Bomu.

A little stern-wheel boat chuff-chuffed into sight and continued upstream, ignoring first their shouted hail and then pistol shots and curses. In the morning they had better success with a flotilla of native paddlers who were returning to their village after rafting their harvest of crude rubber to Besseville, a town on the Belgian side of the river, opposite Suvo. For approximately fifty cents American they were taken aboard, and at midmorning were landed on the dock at Mbwemo.

The little stern-wheeler was tied up with steam hissing softly through her cocks. A black man in a filthy *pereo* stood with one bare foot planted on the taffrail, grinning at them.

Crawford cupped his hands and shouted, "Someday you'll ignore a man's hail and get a rifle bullet amid-ships."

Eddie said, "Don't start trouble. Why don't you ask him if the girl was aboard?"

"Oh, hell, she'll be lucky to get to Suvo by this time."

A native askari in uniform shorts, blouse, and kepi but no shoes emerged from a little sheet-metal sentry hut and came toward them. He stated that he represented the colonial government and asked to see their papers.

Crawford was in possession of some French papers, yellowed from age and dampness, last validated at Brazzaville four years before. The askari shook his head, asked about entrance permits, and commenced peeping inside the tarp covers of the supply packages with a view to assessing the territorial duty.

Crawford said, "That's personal property. I haven't got ten francs' worth of commercial goods to my name."

The askari was particularly interested in Douval's package.

"Leave it alone!" Crawford's tone brought him up to a sort of attention. "We're from Suvo. You saw the papers, they were validated in Suvo."

The askari watched without breathing while Crawford drew four hundred-franc notes from the money pocket inside his shirt. He took the notes from Crawford's hand and pocketed them so deftly that the watching paddle boys did not know a transaction had taken place.

"Yes, bwana!" he said, grinning with his piano-key teeth. "I saw the mark of Suvo, bwana!"

Climbing the path toward town, Eddie said, "You'll get your tail in the screen door sometime bribing officials instead of paying your honest traffic. Sometimes they cache a man just to catch fellows like you."

"Then it'll cost me twice as much. Eddie, that's why you're always broke without enough money to get your trombone out of hock. There's no regulation you can't buy your way through in French territory. Why, if these fellows tried to live on their service checks they'd be out digging cassava with the Bantus. If he's a subcommissioner, he costs twice as much as a captain of askaris. If he's the district commissioner, he costs twice as much as the assistant. Sometime, Eddie me boy, I'd like to run into the minister of colonies on a tour of inspection so I

could prove a point to you, only maybe he'd cost more than I could pay. *Emblème de la colonie*—bribe rampant on a field of skulduggery."

They walked up a street paved with flat quartzite. Here and there a slab had become uprooted, leaving a pool of water from the recent rains. Hindus lined both sides of the street offering for sale a slum assortment of brindle Calcutta cotton, shoes from Japan half papier-mâché, a vast clutter from the hongs of south China, all of it subject to the colonial duty, but still able to undersell the goods from France. At one time some big mahogany trees had shaded the street, but the Hindus had destroyed them through nightly applications of saltpeter so that those in search of shade would be forced beneath the awnings of their shops.

A lorry loaded with clanking, empty oil drums careened up the street with black natives scattering before it. One of its wheels dropped in a hole and sent out a sheet of muddy water that hit Crawford across the thighs.

"Son of a leprous swine!" he screamed, shaking his fist at the Arab driver, who peered at him from the rear cab window. "You infidel essence of dog manure!"

Eddie said, "Why do you make trouble wherever you go? Here we are with a bag of who knows what kind of contraband, in a French port without an entrance visa. You haven't even got a permit to carry your gun."

"I got as much business in this country as the French have, when you get right down to it. To hell with 'em. All they're here for is to collect the hut tax and keep the natives so flat on their financial behinds that they have to work in their lousy palm-oil outfit or starve. You mark my words, Eddie, Uncle Joe and his Communist bastards will keep right on sweeping through the Orient and Africa until people get it through their concrete skulls that a man's a man, no matter what color his skin is."

"Communist talk—that's all we need to fix us up in *real* good shape."

"You see how his propaganda is taking hold? Even in your simple mind. Talk about black and white equality,

and you shout, 'Commie!' You call me a Commie and I'll knock your teeth right down your throat. I may not look it, and I may not sound it, but I'm a Christian. Ma raised me a Christian. Worst beating I ever took was one Sunday I started out for church and ended up in Pop Safford's pool hall. Next thing I knew somebody shouted, 'Duck!' and there was Ma after me with a pool cue. You know, Eddie, some people can be reasoned with, and some can be won over by kindness, but they always had to beat it into me with a club."

"Aye, aye, Allah!" Botamba chanted. "When I was a youth in Katanga did my mother apprentice me to a worker in iron, a black Arab from Zanzibar, and one so holy he could sing the suras of the Koran through all the hours of the week. Hear me tell of this holy man, and how each day he would command us to rest from the forge whilst he sang from the Koran each *sajda* thrice and then listened whilst the apprentices repeated each as far as he could remember, the first to stop being beaten worst, and each after him a lesser amount until the longest repeater was beaten none at all. It was in Arabic, a tongue I knew not, and the welts on my naked prat still rise like the bumps on a brass washboard when the weather is cold."

Mbwemo's hotel was a large, square stone building operated by a Levantine who was morose about answering questions. Herr Doktor was not in. He used a German manner of speech, although he spoke English with a French accent. Herr Doktor had not been in for several days. His wife? The Levantine looked blank. Perhaps there was a mistake. He had heard of no wife.

The day passed, and the night, and the next day. They sat on the hotel terrace drinking brandy and soda with a precious tinkle of ice from the refrigeration machine. They could learn nothing of Dr. Douval.

Crawford had dozed. He awoke suddenly with the realization that someone had crossed the sun-glittering street, had come through the screen door, and was standing over him.

He looked up into the leather-brown face of an old Shari native.

The Shari touched his white fez in a salute that showed he had once served a hitch in the French militia, and spoke:

"You are Crawford, sahib?"

"Yes."

"A message for you." He fumbled beneath his *djellaba* for a note that had been folded to a tight ball. He made no move to release it until Crawford dropped a baksheesh of silver coins in his hand. Then, backing off, he cried, "May Allah go with thee through all thy days!"

"Wait!" The note, signed by Douval, was in French, which Crawford was not quick in deciphering. "Where is he now? Where's the man who gave this to you?"

"I do not know, sahib."

"When did you see him? Where was he when he gave it to you?"

"I got it from a man, from my friend Myhen ibn Daud, and where he got it I know not."

Crawford knew he was a liar, but more questions would only bring more lies.

"It's from Douval," he said to Eddie. "He wants us to bring the package to old Fort Mbwemo. That's eight or nine kilos upriver."

Eddie blew out his breath with relief. "Thank God, then we'll be done with it."

"Yeah." Crawford thrust the note deep in his pants pocket, lighted a cigarette, and glowered as he thought it over. "Yeah, only it seems peculiar."

Crawford was in no hurry to leave for the old fort. He stalled in the face of Eddie's impatience until dinner, and then until the last purple of twilight dissolved into darkness.

He stood in their second-story room, looking through the double window at the sprinkled lights marking the limits of the town. A native drum was booming from the jungle outskirts. The drum reminded him of Botamba, whom he cursed.

Eddie, standing at the open door, said, "Well, come along."

"Just a second." He put down the package and fumbled for his gun inside the uniform can.

Eddie said, "You'll get in trouble with the gendarmes, carrying that around town without a permit."

"To hell with 'em." He kept cursing Botamba.

"Why don't you go down there after him?"

"Full of millet beer, and one of those Sah-hano girls on each knee. The last one of those wing-dings he went in debt five goats for the chief's daughter, and *I* had to make good. I'm telling you, it won't happen again. Next time I'll farm him out on the road gang with a chain around his neck until he's paid up."

Crawford, carrying the package, found a side path from the hotel. He stopped where it cut through the blackness of a plantain orchard. The trees had been cut out recently with thick new clumps rising half again as high as a man's head. After locating a clump that suited him, Crawford chucked the package inside.

Eddie said, "Now what the devil? Douval won't be dumb enough to pay out any money unless the package is in his hands."

"I've been thinking the same thing. That's why I want to make sure it's Douval we're going to see. There was somebody else looking for the package, remember?"

"You think Runkhammer's here?"

"No, I don't *think* he is. I just like to play safe. We got some time and blisters tied up in that bundle, and I'm not going to take any chances on collecting."

At the steamboat docks they found a French mulatto who, for two hundred francs, ran them upriver, through the narrows, to the fort, which had been abandoned during the First World War. Only some gables and one big concrete bastion rose above the mimosa jungle. There was one resident, a slightly deranged old army pensioner who came from his tin-covered godown hut with a rifle over his arm. He had never heard of a Dr. Douval. He was suspicious, and too ready with the gun, so they with-

drew, and Crawford gave the signal that started the launch back to Mbwemo.

The mulatto, guiding the craft one-handed with a tiller rope, said, "I hear you ask for Dr. Douval, monsieur?"

Crawford looked at him sharply and said, "Yes."

"Why, I see heem at the dock only maybe about sundown. Before the floodlights were turned on. He had a girl along. A woman. And what a woman!" He was as black as many full Negroes, but when he inhaled and blew a kiss from his finger tips he was all French. "Lak you Yankee say, some babe!"

Crawford cursed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"But monsieur—"

"Yeah, you didn't know. Where'd they go?"

"Inside the passenger office. Or perhaps the wireless shack. I am not sure. Suddenly, it was dark."

Crawford thought about it as the lights of Mbwemo came in sight. He drew the note from his pocket and read it by the bright moonlight.

Eddie said, "Douval didn't write it."

"How do you know?"

"Well, why would he? To get us out of town? He wouldn't do that if he thought we'd take the package along."

"Only we didn't take it along."

"He wouldn't know that."

"I don't know. He's smart. You don't get to be a member of the Académie Nationale unless you're smart. And if you can save yourself fifty thousand francs, that's smart."

The mulatto said, "Feefty thousand francs? No, you do not thatch your house weeth thees kind of hay. Weeth feefty thousand francs would I seenk thees old Austin engine and buy me a new one-cylinder Falcon from America, five horsepower weeth magneto, and then to hell weeth trying to get a spark from batteries that always short out from fungus during the rains."

The floodlights, fogged by clouds of insects, shone over the docks, but nobody seemed to be around. Up the street

the Hindu shops were still open, their owners lounging outside, enjoying the cool of night after an afternoon when the thermometer had stood at forty degrees centigrade. No one paid them any particular heed. Once more in the plantain orchard, Crawford found the package undisturbed.

"Thought it would be gone, didn't you?" Eddie asked.

"Didn't *you?*"

"Aren't you bringing it?"

"No."

"Afraid somebody will take it away from you?"

"They might try, and then I'd be in trouble for carrying a gun."

Some of the hotel rooms were lighted, but not that corner room of Douval's.

"Let's consult with mine host," Crawford said, and went in the lounge.

The room still held the closed-in heat of afternoon mixed with the odors of garlic and lamb that was served every night for dinner.

Crawford banged the desk bell violently until the Levantine shuffled out, looking bleary, bloated, and dyspeptic.

He listened to Crawford's question about Douval and said, "You get me out of bed to ask about Douval as you have been asking for these last two days? Why couldn't you wait until next week?"

"I asked if you'd seen him." When the Levantine stood stolid and truculent without answering, Crawford lunged across the counter, seized him by his sweaty silk shirt, and dragged him forward. The force with which he struck the desk knocked off his fez and shocked his eyes off focus. Crawford thrust him back and slammed him forward again, repeating, "Have you seen him? Have you? Have you?"

Crawford stopped, breathing heavily, and held him at arm's length. Finally the man recovered his wits enough to speak:

"No, sahib. No. I see nothing of him."

"Were you around here about seven o'clock?"

"No. I was at tiffin. The boy, he—"

"Where's the boy now?"

"He—left. There is dancing at the village. Sahib, I should have you arrested for attacking me." He retreated and leaned for support on the wall while stuffing in the tails of his shirt. "Don't you know I have a hernia? Sometime you could kill a man like that with a hernia."

The spot of violence had relieved the impatience that Crawford had stored up through days of waiting, and he was able to grin from the side of his mouth. "I'll turn you inside out and run a rag through it one of these days if you're not civil in your answers. Let's have a look at your guest book."

There were no entries for that day. He closed the book, tossed it back, and said, "If Douval comes in, call me."

The Levantine nodded and watched them climb the stairs.

Chapter Nine

THE HALL was empty. It held a faint odor of Lysol. Crawford stopped after fitting the big brass key in the door of their room. He could smell the Lysol more strongly. It was carried on the night draft through the steeply tilted door shutters.

Eddie was saying, "I don't see why you had to slap him around. If I—"

"Listen!"

They stood without breathing, but no sound came through the shutters. He turned the key and pushed the door open. Something held it, and he had to push it hard. He booted it, and moved to one side with the Mauser drawn.

A heaped litter of mattress, floor mattings, and everything else had partially blocked the door. The mosquito net had been torn down and trodden. Mattress, pillows, and cushions had been slit open with grass stuffing and feathers everywhere. The Lysol smell came from a bottle that had been broken when the lock on the uniform can was smashed.

"Holy hell!" Eddie whispered.

Crawford laughed. He still had the gun drawn, though bright moonlight coming through the jalousies told him that their visitors had left. He took a good breath and laughed some more.

"What's so funny?"

"I was just thinking of mine host downstairs. I'll bet he'll never rent to anybody else from East St. Louis when he sees this room."

He stopped Eddie, who was groping for the light. He closed the jalousies. One of them gave trouble. It had been pulled loose at the top. The room had been entered from the little front balcony. The screen had been slit and pulled open. The balcony had easily been reached

from the one next to it, or by simply climbing up the thick mass of kabala vine from the ground.

"Go ahead," he said, and the light came on.

It made the litter seem even worse. Nothing had been neglected. Two fly-specked Rosa Bonheur prints had been stripped from the wall and their frames ripped off. The bed had been pulled apart to make sure that nothing had been concealed inside its hollow posts.

"Holy hell!" Eddie kept whispering. "What were they looking for? And don't say the package. Fat chance of hiding that package in the posts of the bed. You couldn't hide it in the mattress, even."

"How about hiding what's inside the package?"

Eddie brightened and cried, "So you have come around to my thinking that there's diamonds inside! Listen, Jim, let's go get that bundle and have a look. If there are contraband diamonds inside—"

"Go *now?*" He pulled his arm free. "Sit down. Use your head. It's a good bet somebody saw us come in. The same somebody that frisked the joint. They probably waited for us at the dock ready to hijack us, then when we showed without the package they decided to come here. We'd better sit tight. The package can wait."

"Think it was Douval and the woman?"

He barked, "No, I don't think it was the woman."

He had every reason to suspect Chari Douval, but he didn't like to. He kept remembering her helpless as a baby in his arms, the way he'd given her medicine, the way she'd clung to his back as he carried her across the high span at Loandu, the way she'd been naked and asleep in the hammock at the fishing village.

"You always were a sucker for a soft left," Eddie said, and went on in falsetto, "Oh, Crawford, you big strong man, you. Oh, Crawford, I'm so little-bitty alone and you got all that hair on your chest!"

"Keep it up, kid, and you'll be gumming your cassava without teeth."

"You're not bullyragging me like you did that Turk downstairs. And while we're going over our affairs, how

about that gold you collected from Chari? Or did she pick your pocket like that blonde in Elizabethville?"

"What would you do with it if I gave it to you?"

"Put it in post-office savings."

"You're dumb. You'd be caught in the first devaluation. No, Eddie, from here on I'm taking care of your money. I'm going to put you on your feet. When we collect from Douval, we'll get an outfit together and head to Zemongo for the ivory trade. Know what I'm taking along? No glass beads, no mirrors, no cheap machetes or any of that old crap. Those natives have got culture since the British started sending them to school. I'm taking comic books. Yes, comic books. I know an outfit where I can get 'em baled, surplus off the American newsstands, for ten cents a pound. We'll clean up. We'll trade a ton of comic books for two tons of ivory. Good old billiard-ball scrivello. And when we've got it we're not selling to those Arab highbinders. We'll sack it under the label of fossil bone and ship it on the rail line to Suakin, where we'll get some American skipper to put us aboard and to hell with the export tax."

"If you think you can get ivory through by calling it fossil bone—"

"Well, we'll fill a couple of sacks with bone and give the inspector a hundred-pound note so he'll know which sacks to open. But we're not stopping there. We're going straight through for the big dough. You remember the Star Royal of the old Negarou line that went down from a stray mine off Zanzibar in '46? We're going to raise her."

"You couldn't raise that hulk for less than a hundred thousand pounds sterling."

"I know a fellow in L.M., a Parsee Hindu from Bombay, that has a diving bell and a compressed-air outfit to blow those hulks out of the water. Charges two dollars a fathom ton for a big one like the Star."

"I'll take my money. Fork it over. Give me my money."

"To hell with you. I'm going to make a success of you whether you like it or not."

He felt for a cigarette, but his last package was empty. Ed Foley had been niggardly with his supply lately, so he rolled one from native leaf. He lighted it and stopped with the match in his fingers, one eye closed against the strong smoke, to listen. He drew his Mauser. He quieted Eddie with a shake of his head, stepped to the door, and with a quick movement flung it open.

A tall native boy of sixteen or seventeen had been bent over with his ear to the shutters. He started back, eyes rolling at the gun, and would have made the stairs at one long-legged leap, but Crawford got him by the length of cotton toweling that served him as a robe.

"Kay-abba!" he cried, struggling wildly. "Good boy. Good boy, *bwana m'kumbwa!"*

"Sure. I won't hurt you." With the boy still struggling, he dragged him through the door. "Who sent you?"

"Bwana doctor, he send. Me good boy. Me—"

"What doctor? Douval?"

"Oui! He send."

"To do what—listen at the door? Maybe you helped him frisk the room, too." Crawford kicked at the gutted mattress. "You help do?"

"No! No, bwana!"

Crawford let him go. "Where is he now?"

He backed off and pointed native style by thrusting out his lower lip. "At old rest home. Where district commissioner live sometime. He say you come."

"He's at the commissioner's house? Where's the commissioner?"

"Poor boy know nothing. Earn two francs carry message. Me good boy."

"Two francs? Why, the lousy cheapskate." Crawford gave him a silver ten-franc piece. "You stick around me, kid, and I'll show you how we pay off in East St. Louis."

He clutched the coin and cried, "You great *bwana m'kumbwa!"*

"Young mamma there too?"

He nodded vigorously. "They say you come, bring package."

"I'll come," Crawford said to Eddie, "but I'm not sure it'd be smart to take the package."

The commissioner's house stood inside a compound of bamboo pickets, shadowed by magnificent old acacias with tops almost perfectly flat so they resembled giant Oriental parasols. It was built in bungalow style, supported by low piles to give it the bottom ventilation that so many Europeans believe to be proof against the miasma of the rainy season. No light burned.

The native boy guided them through patches of moonlight to the front steps. He tried the insect door, which was hooked. He peered inside with his nose against the screen and said, "Bwana!"

Someone was just inside. A man. He said something to the boy. He moved, his weight bringing a complaint from the floor planks. There was a brief shine of metal. He had a chrome-plated gun in his hand. "You're Crawford?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Eh, good. And your companion is Foley. I am Douval." He spoke with an accent that was as much British as French. It was the accent of a man who had learned his English at Oxford.

Crawford said, "How about putting that cannon away?"

"Eh, yes." He lowered it, but he didn't go so far as to put it away. He unsnapped the screen and stepped back. Crawford entered and had his first view of him. He was tall with what had once been a fine physique, though it had been hollowed out by fever till he had the empty-shell look of so many white men in the tropics. He had a strong jaw and nose, and his eyes were set deeply above prominent cheekbones.

Douval said, "You did not bring the package?" A raw edge appeared in his voice. "Did something happen to the package?"

"It's safe enough."

"Where is it?"

"It's not in my room." He said it significantly, trying

to see Douval's face. "You know damned well it's not in my room."

"Eh?"

"You know because you just frisked it."

Douval was unfamiliar with the word "frisked," so he said, "Eh?" again.

"Did you send us a message this afternoon asking us to come to old Fort Mbwemo?"

"No. Of course not. We arrived only at sunset, by private launch. And if you mean we tried to search your room for the package, that is ridiculous." He came close against the screen to peer at Crawford's face. "Monsieur, did someone try to search your room?"

Crawford laughed and said, "They made a good try, all right."

"And that is why you didn't bring the package."

"That's one reason. Another is I wasn't sure of finding you. I'm not sure yet. How do I know you're Douval?"

"You doubt my identity? Ridiculous!" He thought and added, "Well, perhaps it is not so ridiculous."

"Is Chari inside?"

"Eh?" There was a sour twist to his lips. "You are referring to Mrs. Douval?"

"Yeah. I'd like to have her identify you."

"Eh, all right." He fumbled with the door in a preoccupied sort of way while looking over Crawford's head around the compound. "These men who searched your room—you are sure they did not follow you here?"

"Why would they? What you got in it, Doc—the map to Sheba's lost ruby quarries?"

"Eh-eh!" he said, laughing with a bobbing shake of his shoulders. "Rubies, no. It is true thieves might be after it, though not for that reason."

"Or the police."

"Eh? Ridiculous. Whatever gave you that idea?"

He finally got the screen open. He stepped far back, the gun still in his hand, and watched them enter. Until then he had been using the door pillar for support. Now, with nothing to hold to, Crawford noticed how

unsteady he was. He seemed to lack muscle sense, so that he reached for things where they weren't and got hold of them on the second or third stab of his hand. His knees wanted to double back on themselves. He reminded Crawford of a puppet poorly controlled. He reached from a chair to a table to the inside door casing. He stepped over the ant trap by lifting his feet three times higher than necessary.

From the darkness his voice came to them. "Lock the door again, please. There is a hall in here, and some stairs. You turn to your right for the stairs. Are you following me?"

Crawford said, "Yeah, we're following. Why don't you turn on a light? Or don't you want the commissioner to know that you're using his house?"

"The power is off. And it is quite all right with the commissioner. *You* should know why I want no light."

Crawford climbed slowly, listening to Douval above him, laboring, each step a separate problem. A slight moonglow filled the upper story, bringing his big body into silhouette. Halfway up the stairs, a perfume touched Crawford's nostrils. Chari. It was almost like feeling the warm, youthful touch of her body. It had a momentary unsteadying effect, and he spoke her name:

"Chari!"

She did not answer. Douval went rigid. He took a backward step, no longer in silhouette. Crawford's tone had carried a significance of intimacy, and that had been magnified by the suspicion Douval had been harboring all along—the inevitable suspicion of an older man for a young wife, the futile jealousy of one who has lost the power of youth just when he has need of it most desperately. Crawford couldn't blame him. He had spent days and nights with her in the wilderness.

He remembered something she had said. She had stood sucking in her abdomen, looking down on herself clad in shorts far too large for her. "The Doctor, I can hear heem! 'My dear, where did you get the shorts?' he will say. 'From a man,' I will say. 'From a Yankee. We traded

pants in the jungle.' I can see his face when I tell heem. He will be furious. He will challenge you to a duel."

The little bitch! She was a good kid, but she had some bitch in her just the same. The woman never lived that didn't delight in making some poor devil jealous. No wonder so many old men kicked off after marrying young wives, vitamin pills notwithstanding.

He climbed on and said, "Chari!"

"Here, monsieur." She sounded short of breath.

"You got away from the mission, then?"

"Oh, yes."

"How do you feel?"

"A leetle weak, sometimes."

Crawford said to Douval, "She was a pretty sick girl. I think she was sick when she left Bakoville and didn't tell me. That was a pretty tough country for you to turn her loose in, Doc."

Douval spoke savagely: "You are trying to tell me that she owes her life to you? And that I—"

"All the Douval family owes me is fifty thousand francs."

"The amount owing you remains to be seen. I will not pay a centime until I have examined the package."

Crawford barked, "And I'm not sure you'll examine the package until I get paid."

"Keep your voice down! Why do you think I came here instead of to my room at the hotel? Because there are men who would kill me, yes, and kill you, to get their hands on the package."

"Why?"

"Didn't you say the Queen of Sheba's treasure? Rubies, diamonds." He had control of himself again and was able to laugh. He kept laughing under his breath, saying, "Ho-ho, ha-ha," as he hunted his way along the hall, through the door to a room, and across it. Breathing with effort, he worked at blanketing a window; then there was a rapid click-click as he pumped a petrol lamp. He struck a match and got its generator to blazing.

"Yes, why indeed? Close the door. The light could be

seen through the hall and outside. I will wager your curiosity *has* been giving you some trouble." The mantle caught, and after some adjusting it burned with a hissing, white light.

Douval had laid down his gun. It was a special chrome-plated Walther of a kind manufactured for Nazi bigwigs at a time when the Reich could indulge in such luxuries, before the war started to go against it. Crawford, a lover of fine guns, itched to examine it, but he didn't, and Douval went on:

"Believe me, monsieurs, the package is only of scientific value. To you—nothing." He picked up the burned match and turned it in his long, grayish fingers. "Observe this. For how much could you sell this burned-out match? That is how it would be with the package. It is not filled with rubies, or diamonds, or even opium. None of the things that men in this jungle die for."

The light filled out his face so it was no longer all bone and hollow. Nor was he as old as Crawford first assumed. He might have been fifty. At one time, perhaps, he had been handsome in a hawklike way. He still had a hawklike appearance, due to his prominent eyeballs, but they had trouble dwelling on anything. Even in the good white light of the petrol lamp he had trouble making out Crawford's face.

Douval said, "You are satisfied with my identity? Now if you will be good enough to get the package, our transaction will be completed, and you may go your way, and with God's grace we will never see each other again."

Crawford was in no hurry. He looked around at Chari, who stood just inside the door. She was thin, and hollow-eyed, and beautiful. Her lips were parted, and her breathing was more rapid than it should have been. The meeting had excited her—that, or she was afraid of Douval's jealousy.

He said, "You've had a bout with fever, all right. In my opinion, you ought to be in bed right now."

Douval said, "In *your* opinion? You are a physician? You could have killed her with all that sulfa."

"Well, you *are* a grateful—" Crawford intended to name him a grateful bastard, but he changed his mind in deference to Chari. "What a hell of a husband! Why'd you bring her here? When she was at Suvo, why didn't you send her on down the river to Brazzaville, where she could rest up in a nice air-conditioned room? That's what I'd do if she was my wife."

"But she is not your wife! Henceforward you will not speak *of* my wife or *to* my wife!"

"Well, I'm damned!" Crawford turned a chair around and sat down in it the wrong way, his arms crossed over the back. "French chivalry is not dead. Anyhow, it hasn't got *rigor mortis*. Now what comes, Monsieur Doc, do we fight a duel?"

"Get out! Get out and bring the package!"

Ed Foley tried to come between them, but Crawford backhanded him out of the way. "No, Ed. You let Doc talk. When you got something inside you, it's better if you get it out. Keeps you from developing ulcers, and we wouldn't want him to have ulcers on top of everything else. All right, Doc, say it. Say what's really on your mind. You think I've been playing around with your wife. There's where you're wrong. I haven't been playing around. Not in the French interpretation of the word, anyhow. She's a pretty good kid, Doc. When you stop and think about what she's coming home to, she's one hell of a good kid."

Douval was rigid from anger. His fists were doubled at his sides, his eyes protruded, the tendons of his neck stood out. He had lost partial control of his lips. Foamy flecks of saliva glistened in their corners. He tried to answer, but rage had taken his voice away. He moved with a sudden start backward, his right hand darting for the pistol.

Crawford was ready. He lunged forward, shoved the chair backward between his legs, and swung his hand in a chopping arc to Douval's wrist. The gun thudded and skidded to Chari's feet. She snatched it up.

"Stand back!" she cried.

It surprised Crawford, so it was a second before he was able to laugh and say, "Why, Doc, there's the proof of it. Look who she's pointing the gun at. She's true blue."

The fire suddenly left Douval. He tottered across the room. He had a pitiful, double-jointed look. From a shelf he groped down a bottle of Scotch whisky. With jumping fingers he managed to twist off the cap. He poured, half in a glass and half on his wrist. He drank. He tried to pour another drink and his shaking made the liquor miss the glass first on one side and then on the other. He would have dropped the bottle, but Chari, lowering the gun, hurried over to take it from his hand.

She talked to him in French, pleading with him to sit down. He tried to push her away, but he lacked the strength, light as she was. She pulled him toward a chair, alternately begging and commanding like a mother with a pampered and unruly child. She got his arm bent around her shoulders, asked Crawford to bring the chair, and got him seated. Douval's teeth chattered. His knees and arms and shoulders shook. Perspiration stood out on his face.

"Whisky!" He forced his voice. "Don't treat me like a child. I said whisky! Bring it, or I'll call the houseboy to bring it. I am not helpless yet."

"Please, Edmond, please, don't you love me? You know what you promised me, not to drink. You know what it does to you."

Her attempt to reason drove him into an impotent rage. He cursed her in a raw, throat-tearing whisper. "You bitch! You little belly-rubbing bitch! You want me to die so you can get into bed with him."

She looked at Crawford with frightened eyes.

He said, "Go ahead and give it to him."

"It makes his fever come back. He would have died if I had not come back and got him off the bottle."

"Give him a light one. Dilute it with water. Then give him the next with a couple of aspirin dissolved."

Douval stopped raving and watched her pour the

drink. He was so weak she had to close his fingers around the glass and then guide it to his lips. He lay with his head on the back of the chair, his feet stretched far out, and breathed deeply.

At last he was able to smile and say in a husky whisper, "Monsieur Crawford, you have observed me at an unfortunate moment. My weakness comes and passes, but each day I grow a little stronger. The spirillum—you have heard of it? To the west of Lake Tanganyika they have what is called the spirillum tick. It carries the fever. I have seen whole households in the native villages that have been made blind from that fever. Believe me, they are much more pitiful than I. Eh, but you are not interested in my health. Like all Americans, you are interested only in money. So—the package."

"Yes, and fifty thousand francs. That's francs Belge."

"It will be paid, on delivery, according to agreement. Even though the package is late."

"You weren't in town to receive it!"

"*Oui.* I was not. And so it will be paid. On delivery, its fastenings and seals untampered with, it will be paid."

"Now we're around to that again. I said I wanted to see the money, remember?"

Chari cried with unexpected force, "In Bakoville we made an agreement that the money would be paid *on delivery.*"

"Keno! Eddie, she has us dead to rights." He went downstairs with Ed following and stopped in deep shadow beneath the eaves. "I'll get it. Stay here and keep your eyes open."

He walked straight across the compound and village street to the orchard, where he found the package and lifted it to his shoulder. He'd had no feeling of being watched or followed, but he stood quietly for a couple of minutes anyway. There was no movement. The night, except for the distant drums, was quiet. Still, unwilling to take an unnecessary chance, he walked the length of the plantain grove and took a different route to the bungalow.

When Eddie spun around with hair-trigger alarm, Crawford laughed and said, "You'll have to spike *your* liquor with aspirin, too. We'll be rid of this thing in a couple of minutes and it'll be good for both our nerves."

"I was thinking—neither Chari nor Douval would have had strength to pull that bed apart."

"All I want is that fifty thousand francs and I don't care who frisked our room."

Douval was out of his chair, waiting for them in the hall. He seized the package and struggled with it for several steps before dropping it to the floor within range of the lamp. On one knee he went over it, using his fingers to make sure that the wax-daubed knots were all intact. He got to his feet, stood with arms braced on the table, breathing with effort, and said to Chari, "Dear, go over it and look at the seals. See that the impression is on all of them."

Crawford said, "If it's not on all of 'em, it means you didn't put it on all of 'em."

She said, "None are broken."

"Good! And so the fifty thousand francs. Where is my cash order book on the Commerciale Africaine?"

Crawford said, "Don't bother. You might be the Cecil Rhodes of the French Equatorial, but as far as I'm concerned your check's not worth a Bongo dime."

"Unfortunately, it is the check or nothing!"

"Then it's nothing." Crawford tossed the package to his shoulder. By apparent accident the movement opened the front of his coat so the Mauser stuck out. "This is cash on delivery. Cash. The rectilinear lettuce. The holy writ of Wall Street. You know, the long green, the stuff that opens the gates even unto the sultan's harem."

Douval fumbled in his pocket. "I have a few francs. Nothing like enough. Ah—you would have no objection to my check if it were certified?"

"All I want is my dough."

"Very well. I will call Shushakan, the money-changer. If he agrees to honor it tomorrow morning, why then?"

"Go ahead."

Douval found a phone in the hall and worked its crank time after time until a voice crackled at the other end. He said, "Shushakan, number A-one-o-two." After another considerable wait, a man's voice answered. "Shushakan? This is Shushakan? Douval. Yes, Dr. Douval. My cash order for fifty thousand francs will be honored. Here, tell this man that it will be honored."

He offered the phone to Crawford, who shook his head and said, "Go ahead and write it. Remember that's francs Congo Belge, not French. Specify it in the order. And if that Hindu doesn't pay off, by Allah, I'll follow you to the end of the world."

They slept on the ruptured mattress in the disordered room and were at the money-changer's wicket an hour after sunup. Shushakan, a spidery little Hindu, turned the cash order around several times in his smoky fingers and said, "I do not cash private paper."

"Last night when you talked to Douval—" He stopped suddenly. "*Did* you talk to Douval on the telephone?"

"No."

Crawford laughed bitterly. He propped his elbows on the wicket shelf and held his head. "Oh, Allah! Eddie, get back there and kick it. Kick it higher than my shoulders. We been taken, gypped, fleeced. We been clipped like Josh at the country fair."

The Hindu said, "For ten per cent I will endeavor to collect these monies from Brazzaville, monsieur."

"How long will that take?"

"Perhaps an hour, depending on the telegraph operator at Banqui."

Crawford told him to go ahead and walked to the commissioner's bungalow, which was empty, the beds unslept in. Douval had left the night before.

He cruised the streets, the company offices, the docks, inquiring for Douval, but no one had seen him. On the front steps of the hotel he found Botamba.

The black man was seated, bowed forward, his *kuftan* over his head. When Crawford nudged him ungently,

he awoke to look up with pouchy eyes. He smelled of beer, body oil, and ten-franc perfume.

Crawford said, "You're all I needed to make the day complete. You profaner of Allah, you drunkard, you chaser of public women. How does it come that this time you escaped the bastille of the law?"

In answer, Botamba thrust out his feet, which had been concealed by the *kuftan*. They were manacled together by a foot-long piece of chain. "Aye, Master, behold thy poor servant who hath gone bankrupt in thy service. When I left my employment as grease monkey in the shops of Katanga—"

"What trouble did you get into?"

"By Allah, I am the fall guy of a frame-up, as the men of thy nation sayeth. Only did I slap down an infidel Bongo and kick in his slats when he tried to claim a woman for whom I paid money the equal of two goats. Aye, and now am I condemned to work through half the rainy season in the chains of the road gang if I this morning do not pay my fine of two hundred francs. O Master, save thy servant for but two Yankee bucks."

Crawford said, "You see how it is, Eddie? You see why I'm broke? Everybody's got his hand in my pocket."

Minutes later, the Hindu, with a bright blue telegraph slip in his hand, hurried up the street. Crawford waited for him and grabbed the slip from his hand. Douval had no account at the Banque Commerciale Africaine. He laughed bitterly, wadded the paper, and threw it in the street. Shushakan, who an hour before had been making wrinkles in his belly from politeness, now resembled an enraged monkey as he hopped around, staying in front of Crawford, demanding payment of service and telegraph fees totaling 2,500 francs.

Crawford told him to go to hell. He cursed Botamba, but gave him the amount of his fine and told him to get rid of the manacles and inquire if Douval had hired paddle boys or porters at the village. He backhanded Shushakan out of his way and led the way inside and up the stairs to their room.

As he stepped inside, a voice said, "Keep your hands clear, chappies!"

The voice belonged to Runkhammer.

Chapter Ten

CRAWFORD said, "I suppose you think you're one hell of a surprise." He took off his topee and sailed it. "The only surprise to me is that you're so late."

"By the Gawd, I hadn't better be *too* late, or I'll tear you in half with this four-forty-five."

The oil and ammonia odor of powder solvent was strong in the air, so he'd supposed that Runkhammer had a gun drawn. When the flicker of sun blindness left his eyes he could see him seated far forward on the edge of a rattan chair, his big legs bent, knees almost touching the floor, a heavy Webley revolver resting on his thigh.

"Where is it?" Runkhammer asked.

"Like I said, you're late. Why didn't you come around yesterday instead of sending that half-witted message that got us to the old fort? You shouldn't try to use your brain, Runkhammer. Thinking isn't in your line. You start being clever and you get into trouble. In this case you wasted about twelve hours and I already made delivery to Doc Douval."

He asked savagely, "And where is he?"

"You tell me. Finding people must be right in your line. How did you know we were headed for Mbwemo?"

"I spent two hundred sterling with puddle-hopping pilots tracing you to this back-river port." Runkhammer stood up. He had been waiting a long time, and sweat had stuck his pants to the insides of his legs. He moved around the room, pulling at his pants with one hand, holding the Webley in the other, keeping Crawford and Foley under his gaze. He didn't point the gun. He just kept it. He had lived with firearms, knew exactly how well he could use them, and recognized that in this case his advantage was sufficient. Reaching the door, he hooked it with his heel and swung it shut.

He said, "So you gave it to him, and he got out of the country. You know, I was sitting there, all by myself, turning it over in my mind, and I said, 'What sort of lie will the Yank tell when he finds me here?' And that was the one I thought it'd be."

Crawford laughed.

"Aye, have your big, fat belly laugh, but I'm not a hound that sniffs at blind leads. I'll state it to you simply, both of you, and it's this: I'll get the bundle today or I'll kill you both."

"There's a gendarme down on the terrace. How you going to explain two dead bodies?"

"Dead bodies haven't worried me too much in the past. Anyhow, I'm a gendarme myself, one way of speaking."

"You?"

"You're damned right, me, and none of your back-river bobbies, either. I'm a big-caliber bobbie with authority right from the fountainhead of all world justice, the bloomin' United Nations 'erself. Why did you think I was following that woman?" He laughed, as was his habit, through his clenched, powerful teeth. "Not for the same reason you were, I'll wager. Not to crawl in the same tent with her out in the bush!"

"It's a good idea to have that gun in your hand when you make a crack like that."

"Now, there's something for the book! A noble American. I'll wager crawlin' in bed with her never so much as came into your mind. But I didn't come here to talk women. I'll talk women with you at a proper time. *Now* I'm waiting for just one thing—that package."

"How about a book to read while you wait? Something like *War and Peace*."

"No, I'll not wait that long. There are ways. A Spik-Moor up in Dahomey was telling me about a system I been itchin' to test out. You scrape the chemical off matches, and dampen it just a mite, and then you put it under a man's toenails and set it afire. You see, the dampness keeps it from blazing. It just creeps, and smokes,

and pains like the fires in an old-fashioned Presbyterian hell. You take a tough man, 'e said, this lad in Dahomey, and ten minutes of that torture will turn him into a lump of gibber and jelly."

"Aw, the hell with you," Crawford said.

"Where is it?" Runkhammer thundered.

"I delivered it to Douval last night. He left. He and his wife both. All the while you sit there blowing your wind, he and the package are getting farther away. Here, I'll give you some proof. He paid me—see? Look at it. A check. A cash order on the Banque Commerciale—— Africaine, Brazzaville, fifty thousand francs. Only he had no money on deposit."

Runkhammer grabbed the paper and looked at it. He crushed it in his big paw, hurled it across the room, and shouted, "You're still a liar. You're protecting him and that woman. You fixed this up to back your story, but you're still a liar."

"You're dumb, Runkhammer."

"Where are they?"

"I don't know."

"Where'd you make delivery?"

"At the commissioner's house."

"I saw you! I saw you headed that way."

"After you frisked the room?"

"Yes, afterward."

"That's when you should have tried those match heads under my toenails. I had it hidden in the plantain orchard."

"Damn you! Damn your dirty heart! Never trust a Yank, I say. Show me a Yank and I'll show you a man that'd sell his own mother into bondage for five pounds sterling. I should have killed you in Bakoville, and I wouldn't have this trouble."

"You tried."

"Yes, and those snoopin' gendarmes confiscated my gun."

"You'll get *that* young cannon confiscated, too. Put it away."

"All in good time. Now, you were with the package for a week, carrying it, feeling of it. I been thinking, maybe you stole a peep or two inside?"

Crawford stared at him. He dropped into the chair that Runkhammer a few minutes before had vacated. He started to laugh. He beat his thighs and laughed until tears flowed down his copper-brown cheeks.

"What's so damn almighty funny?"

"You mean you been chasing that package half across Africa without knowing what's inside?"

"That's the truth, damn you, I don't!"

Crawford took a deep breath and wiped the corners of his eyes. "Name of Allah! Then why were you chasing it?"

"Because it's my job." Runkhammer's face was hollow and vicious. He shouted it again: "Yes, it's my job!"

"You don't expect me to believe that you're on a mision for the U.N.?"

Runkhammer looked around to ward off eavesdroppers and lowered his voice a notch. "Secret police, do you understand? Secret police on the books of Kenya Colony. Sure, me, the Hammer. Special appointment of his pot-gutted worship, the governor, Brigadier General Sir Malcolm Staats." Runkhammer roared laughter and said, "Gawd blimey, you should have seen the look on him when he handed me my badge instead of the five-year stretch in the willy house like he wanted to. He didn't know what he was doing. Orders from London, no less, and it didn't stop there. But I didn't give him an inkling. I told him nor nobody else why I wanted to travel beyond Nyanza into that gorilla country of Belgian mandate to see what was going on, behind Gawd's back, as the saying is."

He had taken a bit of metal from his pocket. It was a badge crested by the emblem of a crown colony, with "Kenya" in raised letters, and the number "56" die-stamped in the middle.

"Where's the body?" Crawford asked.

"Eh?"

"The body that you took that off from."

"It's genuine, and so am I, as you can find out by sending a wireless to his pot-gutted worship over in Nairobi. But I wouldn't want that to stand between us. I know how you'd naturally feel about police. I'm still the same old Runkhammer, and we been through a bit of this and a bit of that, now, haven't we?"

"In other words, you're out for yourself."

"I'll not deny that. A man has to think of himself now and again, even when he goes about his line of duty. So, if you tell me what's in the bundle, and if anything by way of honest profit comes into my pocket because of it, why, I wouldn't be adverse to a split."

"It was sealed. I delivered it to Douval sealed."

"And you call me dumb! I suppose Douval gave you his regular story about being here in the interests of science, fellow of the French Académie Nationale, and all that rot."

"Isn't he?"

"He might have been, before they cleaned the Nazis out. Didn't you know he was a Nazi? As far as Dr. Douval was concerned, there was only one trouble with Adolf. He didn't have a great big behind so it'd be easier to kiss. Of course, I know you Yanks have short memories, and you took the Nazis to your bosoms as soon at fat Hermann was over the hill, but here's something for you to think about—the same supermen who wanted to lord it over palm and pine under the swastika will turn right around and want to do it under the hammer and sickle."

"Are you trying to tell me that bag was full of uranium?"

"Hell blimey, no. There's no secret about uranium. We all know that the nation controlling the mines of Katanga controls the world's supply of uranium and cobalt. No, it's not that sort of thing. You'll have to stretch your Yankee credulity farther'n that to comprehend what I'm talking about. I'm still talking about the Nazis, and the men that made 'em tick."

"You've found Hitler!" Crawford said wearily.

"No, I haven't found Hitler, but I think Doc Douval has."

Ed Foley said, "Holy hell!" breaking a five-minute silence.

Runkhammer said, "*You* don't think he's alive. You think he died in that Berlin bunker. Suicide. Now let me ask you this—why in hell would they pour petrol over poor old Adolf and set him ablaze like a Christian martyr at a Roman banquet, and at the same time go to the ends they did to prove he was dead? If they wanted to prove he was dead, all they needed to do was leave his body. Why didn't they? Because there wasn't any to leave. Oh, they fooled the Yanks, and the British too, but I'll tell you somebody they didn't fool, and that's the Ruskies. *They* didn't go for that love-couch-suicide business. Why, they've had the secret police scouring the world for him ever since."

"Even if Hitler did get away, he'd be dead by this time. I read the confessions of his personal physician. He had a disease with eighteen syllables, any six of which would have killed him. Anyhow, he isn't in Africa. He's in Argentina."

"Where better to hide out than in Tanganyika, that old German colony? You know yourself how they were goose-stepping around Kigoma during the war."

"Think they have him wrapped up in the package? Shrunk down to the size of a monkey with hot sand?"

"They might have proof of him in the package."

"There was a time limit on the thing. I listened to the girl when she was raving from fever. I have a good idea it contained something perishable."

"I'll tell you something perishable in this climate—undeveloped photographic plates."

Crawford sprang to his feet, turned his back, scratched his neck and turned to face Runkhammer again. "Oh, wait a minute! You're getting me as crazy as you are."

Runkhammer said, "Suppose that there *was* proof in the package—photographs, handwriting, letters. What do

you suppose you could sell it for, cash money, to your bloomin' American newspapers? Or maybe somebody would pay more. Why not let your mind rove and think about how much Uncle Joe would pay to get hold of Adolf and set him up in Berlin, eastern sector, where he could order all his old S.S. boys to squads right and left and run out the bastard Yankees."

"Nazis and Reds are natural enemies!"

"Proved it in '39 when they shook hands and chopped Poland up between them! Or maybe the Yanks would like to get hold of him. How much do you want to wager that they'd give him one of those circus war-crimes trials and kill him off like they did fat Hermann if they had him today? You Yanks! You with your bloomin' halo held over your collective heads like an umbrella without any cloth. Unconditional surrender! Kill off all the hawks so the rats can chew you to death. If you'd listen to the British—"

"It wasn't me that killed fat Hermann and turned Berlin over to the Commies. Are you saying that the U.N. sent you into the mountains of Tanganyika to find Hitler?"

"Why they sent me is none of your blinkin' business. I've told you too much already. Thing I want to know is what's in that package! And I want to know *now*. This gun is getting a bit heavy in my hand."

He stopped. Someone had come up the stairs. There was no sound, but the floor trembled beneath someone's barefoot approach. The door flew open. It was Botamba.

"Bwana—" He started to speak to Crawford and checked himself, seeing Runkhammer.

Runkhammer had started around the wall and found his way barred by the smashed litter of the room. He moved the other way, and Botamba, seeing the gun, swung at it. He missed, but Runkhammer, in dodging, tripped in the torn mosquito curtain and fell to his side. The jar knocked the revolver from his fingers. By reflex he grabbed it with the other hand, but he had it the wrong way, its barrel pointing toward him. Botamba

planted one bare foot on his abdomen and stamped the gun out of his hand with the other.

Runkhammer twisted and came to his feet amid the swirl of Botamba's *kuftan*. Botamba retreated, drawing his machete. He had no chance to use it. Runkhammer swung his right fist in a terrific arc that caught him on the point of the chin. It straightened the huge black man. He looked stiff. He reminded Crawford of a telephone pole he'd once seen butted down by a rhino. He fell, and the back of his head made a solid thump as it struck the floor.

Runkhammer started to follow it up and drive his heavy veldschoen to the side of Botamba's head, but he drew up at a shouted "Stop!" from Crawford. He turned, grinned through his teeth, and saw the Mauser in Crawford's hand.

"So. Now it's *you* got the drop!"

"I don't like to have my boys kicked around."

"Your boy started it, did you notice?" He leaned forward, with one eye closed as though to peer down the Mauser's barrel. "Got it loaded, Yank? I took a slug through the heart one time, or don't you believe that?"

"I wouldn't shoot you through the heart. Not from this range. From here I'd shoot you right between the eyes."

Runkhammer laughed in his thick throat, picked up the Webley, gave it a practiced roll on his trigger finger, and rammed it away under his coat.

"Oh, hell, let's quit this jockeying back and forth. We need each other. I want a look in that package for police reasons. You want to get your hands on that woman. I'll tell you what—we'll follow that pair—"

"All I want is my fifty thousand francs."

"All right, that's up to you. We'll run 'em down. You take what you want, and I'll take what I want."

Chapter Eleven

BOTAMBA sat with his chin in his hands, painfully testing the swivels of his jaw. Seeing Crawford and Runkhammer shake hands on their agreement, he said:

"What kind of master art thou who would trade handshakes with the Christian rogue who hath just beaten down thy faithful servant?"

"You want your back wages, don't you?"

"Aye, Allah!" He forgot his jaw and rocked forward to the position of prayer. "Money, money, Allah, money! At last thou wilt redeem thy promise to send me back a man of wealth to my two wives in Katanga, and do not forget the interest at six per cent, compounded twice yearly as the bankers sayeth."

"That's my boy," Crawford said. "I wouldn't say he's mercenary, but he *is* the only Moslem in equatorial Africa that faces Wall Street instead of Mecca when he prays."

"Money, money!" chanted Botamba. "You will pay me now, O Master?"

"I'll pay you when I collect, verily I will, but first we'll have to overtake that swine Doc Douval, for he gaveth to me a royal rouping."

"Aye, aye, why did I listen to thy honeyed tongue and leave my job as grease monkey in the shops of Katanga? O Master, thou promised to send me home in robes of silk, but instead I dress in rags like a lowly Bonga porter, and every breeze—"

"You give me that naked-behind business once again, and I'll boot it higher than thy shoulders. Did you ask about Douval down at the village?"

Again holding his jaw, Botamba said, "At dawn he hired porters and *tepoi* boys, but where to go I could not learn from that headman, that infidel!"

"How many boys did he hire?"

"As the fingers of both hands, plus two."

"When do their families expect them back?"

"At the tenth or twelfth sunset."

Crawford lighted a cigarette and thought about it. "He'd hire canoe boys if he was headed for Kwanga or Fort Suvo. That means he's going north. Five or six days would put him at that army road from El Fashooda."

Runkhammer, who also knew the country, nodded. "We'd better move. We'll be almost a day's travel behind as it is. That package! I tell you the sun will not set twice more before I have my hands on it!"

Rain came in a deluge. They were packed and outside beneath the awnings when it stopped.

Eddie said, "Did you pay the Levantine?"

"No. Where is he?"

Eddie looked back inside and returned nervously. "I haven't seen him."

"To hell with it. I paid him the first day. I paid him more than his bug menagerie was worth. Say, if you think *I'm* going to shell out for the damage that was done in the name of the United Nations . . ."

"Don't give it a worried thought, Yank," Runkhammer said. "We'll send the bloomin' bill to Trygve Lie."

They left with rain dripping warm from the awnings and the sagging leaves of plantain trees. The gutters were awash, and cobbles steamed in the sun, which was out again, shining with new intensity through the washed atmosphere.

At the native village they were held up by a haggling headman, and by the fear many of the natives had of Runkhammer, whose reputation had gone far ahead of him. Finally, by offering double wages, they got a group together and set out through the heat of late afternoon. There were six porters, a cook boy, and a pinkish, almost blind albino from one of the Shari tribes whom Crawford insisted on taking along "for luck."

They made rapid progress. The country was hilly, but with little jungle. The boys were lightly loaded. Crawford and Foley had no more than eighty pounds, and Runk-

hammer had no outfit at all except for a portmanteau, a double gun case, and a blanket he had stolen at the hotel. There was no necessity for carrying a large supply of food, for the country they headed into was productive, with each village boasting its herd of humpbacked Egyptian cattle, and its shambas that grew fruits, vegetables, and small grains.

There were four footpaths, any of which would have led by a devious route to the army road, but they were in luck in immediately striking the one taken by Douval. At four kilometers, a group of Bongo natives cultivating beans in a shamba between the hills said yes, another safari had passed about dawn. "White mamma safari," they said, and pointed its course, native fashion, through thrusting out their lower lips. The trail forked, but other natives, driving cattle to the enclosures for the night, kept them informed of "white mamma's" course. Many did not even realize Douval had been along, having seen only his lay-down *tepoi* with an awning and green insect net.

At night, in a Deran village, they heard the distant tongue of a message drum, and the albino proved his worth by translating it in the Shari jargon, half sign language, augmented with a crude map that he scrawled with his big toe in the dirt. The white mamma's safari was at Jabbhir rest house, less than twelve kilometers to the north.

They rested, and went on by bright moonlight. For a few kilometers the footpath was easily followed through grasslands. It then plunged into the dark jungle crossing of a river, and they were slowed to a kilo an hour. At dawn they crossed a pontoon bridge of baobab trunks and left the river to follow the deep crevice of a ravine. Message drums sounded—one beside them on a hillside deep in bush, one ahead, and then a third in the far distance. Runkhammer kept shouting in the Shari dialect, asking the albino for their message, and then, cursing, forged ahead, too impatient to wait for an answer.

They passed through a poor country of rocky hills

and thorn. The sun was shining hot when they reached Jabbhir village.

The chief's son came to meet them. He was a tall, thin young man, very erect and well featured despite the welt scarring that identified his tribe. He had a natural dignity and sense of courtesy that would have distinguished him in a European drawing room, and it angered Runkhammer, who insisted on crowding in front of Crawford and shouting questions, which, on occasion, had already been answered.

The young native said young mamma had stayed there, and had left at dawn. The drums a short time ago said she was at Kafa Kanga village, yet on leaving she had asked the directions to Jebel crossing and thence to El Waid.

"You're sure white mamma didn't pay you a special baksheesh to lie for her?" Runkhammer asked.

The tall native was quite sure that mamma had paid no baksheesh.

"Well, that's not Runkhammer's style." He dug down for a silver ten-franc piece and offered it to him, but the native ignored it, and he threw it in the dust.

"Damn a nigger," he said, going over to the breakfast camp with Crawford. "You see him look right through me when I handed him that dime? The cheek of him! I suppose he wanted a pound note. I say, once those follows get to thinking, they're as good as a white man and there'll be nothing left to do but string 'em up by their thumbs and tear the skin off their bloody backs with a three-tongue whip."

They followed a footpath that forked and forked again, taking them deeper into bush country. It rained. They paused only through the hottest hour of siesta, and went on with porters grumbling at the pace. The bush opened, and there were some poor cassava and yam fields, and a village of thatch huts deserted except for old men and women, all the others having fled for fear the white men had arrived to extort the government head tax.

Crawford won the confidence of one old native through

gifts and cajolery, and learned that while no safari had been there, one passed another village, and he pointed in the easterly direction from which they had come.

They retraced four or five kilometers of footpath and picked up the trail again. The bush opened on grasslands, and at sundown, from a low ridge, they looked across odd-angular shambas just sprouting brilliant green from the rains to a rather large village, with a government-built rest house on a knoll beyond.

It was evening, with the distortion of heat wave gone from the air, and they could see everything with a fine-edged distinctness. Ten or a dozen porters were crouched in a group in front of the house preparing their supper. A thin spiral of smoke rose from the stovepipe at the back of the house. Once they even glimpsed a flicker of movement inside the shuttered front veranda.

Grinning through his strong teeth, Runkhammer said, "End of the long trace. Mayhap it's better this way, far from the commissioner and his snoopin' native police."

They skirted the fields, missing all but a few scattered huts of the native town, and came up through a coffee grove to the lower edge of the compound. The porters, squatted around their pot of mealie meal, straightened to watch, and again there was movement in the house.

"Saw us," Crawford said.

"Eh?"

"Gun shine."

"Where?" Runkhammer turned as he asked and grabbed his gun case from the boy. He got it open and looked down on the two guns it contained—a Beretta submachine gun and a nine-millimeter Mannlicher with a big-ended Zeiss telescopic sight.

He chose the Mannlicher, looked at its windage adjustment, and said, "Where did you see it?"

"Put that gun away," Crawford said.

"This is my show, too, Yank me boy." He kept one broad shoulder toward Crawford and the gun out of his reach. "Why, you let me do business with this cross-

hair sight and I'll reduce the competition for that gal's love by one hell of a per cent. I'll fix it up so no husband will stand between you. Then there'd be only me, and you, and Eddie over there, and we could settle the possession of her through compromise. Maybe I'd trade you my interest in her for your interest in that bundle. I'd even be willing to let her take her choice, after looking the three of us over." While talking he took the oiled-rag stopper from the gun muzzle and worked the bolt to load it. "And don't be too smug about that proposition, because it's not so certain that she'd grab you in preference to old Runkhammer. Sometime I'll tell you about the time I rescued the commissioner's daughter from that black Arab slave pen up past Archambault, and how she was never satisfied with her lot in life since."

"You already have."

"Not *all* about it, I'll wager. I've had my way with women, Yank, and I have yet to drag one by the hair of the head unless I could see it was what she needed. I was never what anyone called 'andsome, but I had my way with 'em. Especially in Calcutta. Aye, those were the days—my Calcutta days, my young days, my hell-raisin' days. Captain in the army of the King!" He talked as they walked through the coffee trees on a circuit of the house. "I'm not blowin' my tuba, mind you, but I don't mind saying that at one time I numbered among my mistresses the daughter of a maharaja, a whole troupe of Siamese temple dancers, and the wife of my commanding officer. Oh, I've tried 'em all, Yank, and there's no life like the army life. That talk about me losing my commission on account of a couple of fractured skulls among the Sikh noncoms—that wasn't the real reason. The real reason was that those milksops down at the officers' club didn't have the vigor to compete with me."

"I'd kill you before I turned that girl over to you."

"Ha!"

There was no way of approaching the house closer than a hundred meters without exposing themselves. They stopped, and Runkhammer spoke:

"Well, General, what next? You're a friend of theirs, you've had business dealings with 'em, you've saved the little woman from the black death of the jungle—maybe you'd like to walk up there and explain the peaceful mission that brought us here, and the fact that they're damn well surrounded. I'll cover you from here."

"I'm not afraid to go up there!"

It wasn't exactly the truth. The thought of exposing himself put an unsteady feeling in his guts, but he masked it before the Hammer's grin, and with a handkerchief signifying truce stepped into the open.

A gun exploded sharply and a high-velocity bullet tore the earth by his feet.

It was a warning shot, but reflex made him dive headlong. He twisted over in the cover of some creeping vines and crawled back among the coffees. There he heard Runkhammer roaring laughter, stamping and whacking his thighs.

"You know who cut loose at you? It was *her*. That sweet little thing, paying you back for all the trouble you've gone to. Now I'm *not* so sure she'll choose you instead of Runkhammer!"

Crawford cursed him. He'd lost his topee and did not retrieve it. There was nothing to do except wait for nightfall.

Natives, surprised by the shot, had started up from the village. They stopped on meeting the fleeing members of Douval's safari. After minutes of milling and jabbering, one of the headmen of the tribe, with an assagai in one hand and an elephant-hide shield in the other, advanced with nine warriors an apprehensive distance behind.

Crawford said, "We'll have to keep them clear of this place."

Runkhammer said, "Yeah," and sent them scattering with a blast from the Beretta submachine gun. They kept jabbering beyond the first line of huts and trees, but none showed his face, and during the brief, translucent minutes of twilight the drums began to beat.

Finishing his third cigarette in a row, Runkhammer stood with the gun in the crook of his arm and said, "I'm going to give 'em their chance to come out, and if they don't I'll shoot 'em out. Give 'em time enough and they'll slip through our fingers in the dark."

"It's dark enough now. I'll go up there."

"You lay it on the line, as you Yanks say."

Eddie said, "Crawford, for God's sake—"

"You worry about yourself, kid. I die hard."

Runkhammer followed him. "I wouldn't want you gettin' your hand on that gal and forgettin' what you went up there for."

He barked, "Do you know of anybody I've ever double-crossed? No? Then squawk when you get hurt."

He strode off through the trees, circled to the back of the compound, and advanced so the cook shed hid him from the main part of the house. He reached the tumble-down compound fence, and dropped to one knee while waiting for heavier darkness to settle.

The stars were coming out, and the moon was a rising fragment of brilliance through the trees. The house, topping the rise, was a solid mass of blackness.

He stood without drawing a shot. He moved forward, taking his time, crossed the compound, and reached the door of the cook shed. He expected its screened door to be hooked, but it hung open on broken hinges.

He stepped inside. He listened. He moved, groped, touched the warm bricks of a stove. The floor had started to rot out, and he had to find its supports to keep it from collapsing under him.

The cook shed was a separate building, connected to the house by a roofed-over passageway no more than one step in length. There were no doors to open. He reached the main room. For the third time in his experience, he was aware of her presence through perfume in the dark.

He stood still. He listened, trying to shut from his ears the rapid *boom-ta-ta-boom-boom* of war drums in the native village, trying to distinguish only that which was close to him in the room.

He no longer was able to smell the perfume. Around him were only the smells of the rotted house, the peculiar reptilian odors of abandonment to the gekkos.

He said quietly, "Chari!"

He heard and felt her startled movement. She was scarcely an arm's reach away. He was afraid she was ready with the gun.

He said, "I'm alone."

She whispered fiercely, "You lie? You—"

"I've never lied to you yet."

"You *are* alone!" Her voice was suddenly pleading.

"Yes," He waited. He groped for her. He found only the empty blackness of the room. "Chari!"

"Yes." She sounded short of breath and defiant.

"Chari, come here."

A minute before he had been afraid of a bullet through the heart. He had no thought of danger now, only of her, the girl he had carried through the jungle, and cared for when she was helpless as an infant.

He repeated, "Come here," and she responded.

She touched his outstretched hand. It guided her. She came close against him. She leaned on him. Her arms were at her side. He had the feeling that she would have fallen if he had not been there to support her.

He took her by the shoulders. He knew he was holding her too tightly. He wanted to relax his grip, but for some strange reason he lacked the will to do so.

"Crawford!" she whispered, with her peculiar pronunciation making it sound like Craw-faid. "Crawford, no."

With an effort he relaxed his grip, but she did not move away from him. "No!" she whispered.

A thought occurred to him that made him unsteady.

He put his arm around her. He still felt that he was supporting her, yet when they walked it was she who led and he who followed. She crossed the room. She was looking for something. They collided with a table. Then suddenly she sat down. She reached up and seized both of his hands.

"Don't be scared," he said. "I won't let anything happen to you."

She pulled him toward her. She was seated on a rattan settee with a raffia-stuffed cushion. It made a dry sound as she moved, and it gave off a dusty odor.

She threw her arms around his neck, pulled his head down against her breast. It was unexpected and he almost fell. He was on his knees. He could hear the hard, quick impulse of her heart.

She whispered, "I theenk I would never see you again. I have been theenking of you all day, many days."

He said, "I should never have left you at St. Peter's. I should have taken you downriver to Brazzaville."

"Yes!"

"You'd have gone with me, Chari?"

"Yes, oh, yes!"

"I love you, Chari." They were words that had never come from his lips before. It was preposterous that they came now—from his lips, Crawford's. He repeated them. "I love you."

"Yes!"

"I'll get you out of here. You have to come with me. This jungle will kill you."

She did not answer. He had the feeling that she had not even heard him. She clutched his head desperately. She'd slid down on the settee so she could press her lips to his ear. Her lips were warm and damp. Her breath in his ear gave him a peculiar, dizzy feeling.

"Chari, did you hear me?"

"Yes!" she whispered. "Why don't you kiss me? Why don't you hold me?"

"We've got to get out."

A noise startled him. He pulled back, tearing himself free of her grasp. She thought he was leaving her and reached for him desperately.

"It is not heem!" she whispered. "He is upstairs. I tell you it is not heem!"

For the moment he had forgotten all about Dr. Douval.

"Your husband."

He forced himself to say it. He said it to drive the fact home to himself, and Ma was there, the things she'd hammered into his concrete head ever since he was old enough to know the meaning of words, that nobody except a penny-ante bum would sneak around and crawl in bed with another man's wife.

He seized her wrists, tore her hands apart, held her away from him, and stood up.

She said, "Crawford."

"Yeah."

"Where are you? Please come to me. You said—"

"I know what I said, only you're his wife."

"According to the law! But *that way* I am not his wife. You have seen him. He is not a man, like you are a man. I love you both, but you are different. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, but it's no good, Chari. We'd just be a couple of bums."

It took her a few seconds to realize he was telling her no.

She cursed him in French. Her voice was a feline whisper. He did not realize what was happening until she was on him, and ripped her fingernails downward across his face and the sides of his neck.

"I hate you, you hear? I hate you!"

"Listen, Chari—"

He fended her off. He tripped over a stool and fell. There was a thud of feet on the floor above, and Douval called, "Chari, Chari, my dear. What is wrong down there?"

She did not answer him. She was sobbing and calling Crawford names. He knew she was hunting for something. A gun exploded with a white streak of fire. The bullet was wild to Crawford's left. He caught a flash impression of her, her crouching figure, her eyes, the delicate Roman bend of her nose.

He kept going as the gun exploded twice more. The room was filled with the throat-grabbing fumes of cordite.

He found a door, and moving through found himself

behind the screens and vines of the front veranda. He went down some broken steps, found the cover of a cape jasmine, and crossed the compound yard, which was just being covered by the light of the rising moon.

"Bwana!" Botamba said from the shadow ahead of him.

"Yes."

The big black man exhaled and Crawford could tell he was lowering a rifle. "Thou shouldst speak thy name, O Master, for I came within one breath of pressing the trigger, and then who would have paid me my back wages that I might return a man of wealth to my two wives in Katanga?"

Chapter Twelve

He reached Botamba and asked, "Where are the others?"

"Eddie, the tooter of trumpets, is still in the coffee grove, and where that Christian swine Runkhammer went I know not. Was someone shooting at thee, Master?"

"That was my general impression."

His neck smarted. He rubbed his hand over it and looked at the smear of blood by moonlight. Fingernail wounds were always likely to infect in that climate, and he wanted to dust them with sulfa powder.

"Find the uniform can," he said, and walked on to locate Eddie in the coffee grove.

"Holy hell!" Ed whispered from relief. "I thought they'd killed you."

"Say the rest of it."

"What do you mean?"

"That you thought I'd be dead and you'd never get your split of the dough. 'O Master, do not get bullets in thy guts or else I will never collect my back wages.' And after all I've sacrificed for you tramps."

"I didn't say anything about money, but while we're on the subject—"

"We're not on the subject. To hell with it. The subject is—where's Runkhammer and what's he up to?" The drums had taken a quicker tempo, and he didn't like the sound of them. "Those natives! They have Shari blood, and maybe a touch of Arabic. I wouldn't like to antagonize 'em too far. They get full of palm wine and that voodoo beat . . ."

Botamba with the uniform can said, "The infidels! We Moslems fear them not." But he kept his hand on the machete under his *kuftan*.

With Crawford still stroking his neck with the medical powder, they moved through trees and across open

moonlight looking for Runkhammer. They made a complete circle of the compound without discovering him. By then the moon had cleared the treetops, lighting the open ground and the near side of the house almost like day.

Without warning a gun exploded. Its flash placed it at one end of the second-story veranda. The Beretta pounded an instant later. Runkhammer was midway in the yard. He had tried one of the side approaches and they'd seen him.

He fired with the automatic trigger held down, sending a steady stream of lead into the house. The Beretta had a muffled sound, probably due to the low-power Italian loading. Mixed with its explosion could be heard the dry-basket sound of bullets tearing through the frame, bamboo, and plaster of the house.

He fired the clip of twenty out in one jackhammer burst. Crawford, shouting at him to stop, had the Mauser out, but Eddie grabbed his forearm.

"That's the Hammer."

"I know who it is. He's trying to kill them both."

There were more gunshots from the house. One of them struck metal with a glancing screech. They glimpsed Runkhammer scramble for the Beretta, which had been smashed from his hands. He retreated crabwise, trying to keep a little hump of ground between himself and the house.

Crawford laughed and said, "There's the man who isn't afraid of a bullet through the heart."

They moved on, intending to intercept him when he reached the bushes that grew along the compound fence, but he had taken a new direction, and the Beretta was going again, raking the house, sending methodical horizontal sweeps of lead through first the lower story and then the upper one.

Crawford shouted, "Stop it! Stop it, damn you!" until Runkhammer heard him.

"To hell with you, Yank. And stay at your distance unless you want some of the same."

He loaded another clip of twenty and poured it in with the automatic trigger held down.

When the gun paused Douval could be heard calling for him to stop.

He bellowed in answer, "Yes, you're bloody well sure I'll stop as soon as you come out with the package in your hands."

"I can't carry it!" Douval's voice was high-pitched and desperate. "I can't even walk. She has to help me. You can see I haven't got it. It's in the house. My God, I can't find it without a candle, and who dares light one?"

"Come out!"

"You won't kill me?"

"I'll spare your hide, only don't try to sneak the package."

He waited, still suspicious, the gun ready. Crawford came up within fifty steps of him and said, "Don't try anything."

"Oh, it's you, Yank. You see how it's done when you get sick of pussyfootin' it? I'm getting the package, Yank. If you want to collect your fifty thousand francs, follow 'em. If you want that woman, follow her. Tonight the Hammer is getting that blooming package."

A door closed, and he tensed over the machine gun. Douval and Chari came into view near the front of the house.

"All right, stop there a second. Move apart. Turn around with your hands out." When he was satisfied they'd left the package, he growled, "All well enough. Go and be damned."

He stood spread-legged and watched them hurry away through the lower compound gate. With the Beretta in the crook of his arm he walked up the rising ground to the house.

He hesitated and cursed. A glow of light had appeared, ruddy and shifting, dying at first, then bursting, growing. One of the inside rooms was ablaze.

He ran with lumbering strides. A door stopped him, and he smashed through it.

Crawford could hear him lunging and cursing inside. He staggered out, blinded by smoke. He tried to enter again, but he had no chance. The smoke had a strong odor of petrol. Flames had raced throughout the house, climbed the bamboo walls, and burst through the thatched roof. The house became an inferno, its heat driving them back, its light illuminating the compound knoll like a giant torch.

Runkhammer tossed the Beretta to his shoulder and fired into the darkness that had swallowed Douval and his young wife. Crawford rammed the barrel up and they struggled for the gun. It discharged accidentally, tearing the earth around their feet. When it seemed that Crawford was about to lose an advantage, Botamba leaped in, seized the weapon, and with a mighty upward swing of his arms tore it away from both of them.

"I'll kill you, Yank! I'll kill you!"

"You cut loose into that native village and we'll all end up with our heads in a basket."

"Aye." He drew a deep lungful of air. "Well, why do we stand here? I'll get 'em yet. Maybe they burned it, but I'll get them. They'll talk. They'll talk when I'm finished."

He strode downhill toward the gate. A native cried, *"Kay-abba!"* and an assagai spear whisked past like a shadow and dug its iron head in the turf.

The assagai was a warning. Spearheads gleamed here and there in a half circle all around the lower compound.

"Let's get out of here," Eddie said. He got hold of Crawford. "To hell with him. Let's *us* get out of here."

Runkhammer, running, caught up with them. From the groves back of town they watched the fire burn down to coals, and the coals fade beneath a gray veil of ash. The drums beat steadily until morning.

Dawn revealed spear-carrying warriors in continuous movement along the street. Crawford, Runkhammer, Foley, and Botamba retreated up the footpath about six kilometers and waited on the chance that Douval would choose that route, but only a lone Arab trader with two

top-heavy camels passed in the hours before siesta. That evening, after a wide circle of the village, they came upon the albino and three of their Bongo blacks cooking green bananas over a fire.

From the albino they learned that "big *bondele* and mamma *bondele*" had left the village with an escort of twenty askaris, but he had no idea of their direction.

Three days of questioning at one tiny village after another failed to reveal anything more. Natives, who before had been cordial, now met every question with "No-no," or simply with a truculent silence.

At last the albino heard a drum message that indicated a white woman had reached the army road, but when they got there they found that a lorry convoy had passed, so the Douvals could be in Banqui, or by plane to Brazzaville, or anywhere.

"Five months of my life," Runkhammer said over a bottle of vile Moroccan cognac in the hot winehouse at Fort Ziemel. "Five months and half the continent of Africa, then up in flames so close it singed my fingers. But I know something. Yes, I do, Yank. I know where they got it. I could take a pin and stick it in the map at the point they got it."

Crawford spat. "You could, eh?"

"Yes, damn you, I could. Listen—have you ever heard of a chap named Clifton, around Nyroanga?"

"Clifton? No."

"Well, that's not surprisin'. He's—"

"Wait!" Crawford held up a hand. "Yes, I *have* heard the name. Chari mentioned it several times when she was delirious."

"Haw!" Runkhammer grinned. "And well she might. She an' the Doc paid a little visit to Clifton not so long ago—one of several visits, I might add—an' when they showed up in Bakoville afterward they had that bloomin' package with 'em. That's where they got it, Crawford me boy—at Clifton's."

"Well, who the hell *is* Clifton?" Crawford broke in.

"Now, that's what I call a real interestin' question,"

Runkhammer said. "The answer ought to be even more interestin', if we ever get it—which we will, Yank, me lad. You can trust your old friend Runkhammer for that. This Clifton was a Nazi, an' a big one, an' that's all anybody knows for sure. He's up to something right peculiar, I can swear to that. I spent some time up there a while back. A real mystery man, he is, an' that's the way he wants to keep it. But he's at Nyroanga, an' I say let's go there. There's a Dutchman has a place not far from Clifton's where we could set up headquarters, so to speak. Or there's a mission, if you're feelin' righteous."

Crawford poured himself another glass of the cognac and sat staring at it. Finally he said, "I hate to admit it, but for once you may be right. There's no point in rushing off in all directions looking for the Douvals. If we can get to Nyroanga, that might be the long way round that'll prove the shortest way home."

Runkhammer slammed a heavy hand on Crawford's shoulder. "That's me boy," he roared. "We'll go there, Yank. Aye, I'll cut you in. You, and Eddie, and even big Botamba, damn his guts, I'll cut you in. A half for me, and a half for you any way you want to cut it. And if it's Adolf, we won't bring back a picture of him. No, you're damn bet we won't. We'll put him in a bloomin' cage, that's what we'll do, an' we'll haul him out like a great ape on his way to the museum!"

Chapter Thirteen

A FORD rattled loose fenders and disappeared into the flamelike mirage toward the coffee plantations of Bula Gombe. For a long time after it was gone the dust from its wheels hung in the hot morning air like fine-ground kafir flour, marking the slats of sunlight that came through the palm fronds.

Crawford, dressed in whites, cut across the street to the government house, a structure dating to the days when Tanganyika was a German colony, and still showing, under several layers of paint, the cornice decorations emblematic of the Hohenzollern empire.

He avoided some broken boards in the steps, and jerked the bell pull.

A tinkle answered from deep in the building. Resigned to no immediate answer in the heat of that season, he took his ease with his pipe-clayed topee off for comfort.

At last there came a slap-slap of bare feet on woven palm mattings, and a tall black native from the northwestern border came in sight, buttoning his white servant's coat.

"The commissioner is expecting me," Crawford said.

The boy, with the erect magnificence of his tribe, led him inside and up a flight of cobwebby stairs to an office that had recently been enclosed by bronze screen.

"*Bondele* come," the boy said, bending down to see through the door—he was that tall.

"Tell him to enter," a man said in a nasal, metallic voice.

Crawford went in and found him seated at his desk. He was a Negro, rather small and wiry, dressed in whites, a pongee shirt, and two-toned shoes; his hair had been pomaded and slicked back with the comb marks showing in an unsuccessful attempt to remove its natural kink. The pomade was perfumed, and the perfume, with

sweat, gave the sort of sickly-sweet odor that one would expect at the front door of a brothel. Behind him a white canvas hammock swung limply, making it evident that Crawford had disturbed his early siesta.

The spidery Negro moved in his chair, showing just the right amount of courtesy, and spoke:

"Mr. Crawford, I assume. I say, this is a pleasure."

He imitated the accent of a Britisher, but too broadly, making it a caricature. It reminded Crawford of the British accents affected by a generation of American vaudeville comedians now extinct. He grinned, hooked a chair with his toe, and sat down. He slid forward in the seat, his legs out, and, resting on his shoulder blades and tail bone, lighted a Royal Bengal cigarette.

"A pleasure," Crawford repeated. "Maybe I *can* make it a pleasure for you. You call yourself Latham, don't you?"

"My name is Roger Latham."

There was a touch of reproof in his tone, but not too much reproof. Crawford inhaled, blew a cloud of smoke, and studied him through it. He was a Turkana native, he decided, though he might have had some white or Arabic blood. His origin in a native kraal was obvious enough, though, for his two lower incisors had been removed after the tribal manner; not as precaution against lockjaw, as was popularly supposed, but to please the *engai* fetish, one tooth each for the moon and sun, rulers of the sky. It was common gossip, a standing joke all the way along the rattling, meter-gauge railway from Tabora, that this Latham had once been the commissioner's barber, and had simply taken over when that official, tired of trying to pay inflated costs with devalued shillings, simply packed his trunks and went to work for the sisal combine without bothering to write the customary resignation. For the better part of a year Latham carried on the district affairs, which were not onerous, prepared all reports, and signed them with a flourish, "R. Latham, Deputy," before the governor began to hear rumors of the true state of affairs and started to

investigate, and by then, so the story went, it was too late, for he had already spoken before the regular meeting of the Executive Council, pointing with pride to that district's efficiency, and holding it up as a model for other district offices to follow. So, to save face, the governor uttered some resounding phrases lauding the advancement of African citizenship under his tenure, and rushed the appointment through the Legislative Council.

Latham seemed not in the least bothered by the amusement in Crawford's gaze. He tapped his fingers on the desk, polished a big imitation diamond ring on his shirt sleeve, and whistled something from *Pinafore*. Then, to complete the caricature of a British colonial, he affixed a monocle in one eye.

Crawford laughed, a dry jerk of his shoulders, the cigarette scissored in one corner of his mouth. He said, "Praise God that Benjamin Disraeli isn't around to see this kick at the collapsing bones of his empire."

"Eh?" The Negro was no fool, and though he knew well enough what Crawford had said, he saw no reason to get angry. "You have some business to transact, or are you merely paying your respects?"

"The respect I have for you I could have paid out in the *piccinnin kia*. You got my note, didn't you?" He leaned back, inhaled, and talked smoke from his lungs. "As it said, I represent Dexter Mahogany and Dyewoods, Limited. Our concern is at present expanding to new primary fields either here or in the Malay Archipelago." He tossed over his identification folder, and apparently by the merest accident a couple of ten-shilling bank notes fluttered out.

While Latham squinted through his monocle at the identifications, Crawford's eyes wandered the room. The usual maps hung on the walls, a dusty British flag stood in a brass holder behind the desk. Through the screens and jalousies he could see up the street to the hotel, where Runkhammer and Ed Foley were waiting for him.

Latham said, "I say, old chap, cawn't say that I've ever heard of this Dexter outfit. Mahogany, you say?"

"Next time I'll come representing Burma Shave," Crawford said, recalling that Latham had been the commissioner's barber. "Or do you prefer the old-fashioned shaving brush?"

"I use a brush, a German razor, and the best French soap. But my prices have gone up. Furthermore, old top, I always warn my customers not to talk while I am shaving them, or else they might get their throats cut."

Crawford sat up in his chair and looked at the Negro with new interest. It wasn't often you found an African who could toss it around in the white man's vernacular. "Well, I'm damned! Yeah, I came here to be shaved, but I don't want to pay more than the union price. How much do you want?"

"Honor of the Empire, old man. Bribery—"

"The hell with you. I haven't got time to be subtle." The two bank notes still lay on the desk. "You better pick that money up before the monsoon blows it away."

"Oh, of course. Careless of me to leave it lying around. But I was certain I saw twenty more."

"I came here to get shaved, but not clipped. It's either that or—" He realized he might be talking too loudly. He lowered his voice. "That or nothing."

"Shaved but not clipped. Heh, heh! I say, that was a bit of all right. But, as the American big-game hunters are fond of saying, no soap. You catch it? No soap."

"Yeah, I caught it." He fumbled with the money folder and produced two more tens.

Latham placed the four notes one on top of the other and smoothed them carefully. He liked the feel of money, and took a long time about it. Finally he locked the money in a drawer and said:

"And now, according to your note, there was some favor you wanted me to grant the American scientists who are about to leave for Nyroanga."

"I want their travel permit temporarily suspended."

"Oh, I say, but it was granted by the office at Tabora."

"Back in East St. Louis, where I come from, the barbers never complain about how tough the whiskers are.

Anyhow, the suspension will be only temporary. Tabora will never know about it. Inform the good Yankee scientists that Nyroanga is too dangerous for newcomers without guides. The colony of Tanganyika goes to great lengths to protect the safety of its eminent guests and all that sort of crap. Tell 'em they'll have to have white guides, three of 'em. We'll apply for the jobs, and the travel suspension can be lifted tomorrow morning."

Latham scribbled notes on a pad, said, "Right-o!" and swung his chair around to look at a yellowed wall map. "Nyroanga. I say, why in the devil would you be wanting a free ride to Nyroanga?"

"Mahogany."

"Ha! You'd need timber with heartwood of pure gold to pay for its shipment."

"They're special trees. Know what we make out of 'em? The backs to Stradivari violins."

"There have been peculiar stories about a strange man hiding in a mountain palace in the great rain forest of Nyroanga. If you should happen—"

"I'll tell you what—if I run into Adolf up there I'll give him your greetings."

"Yes," said Latham without smiling. "You do that, old top."

Chapter Fourteen

CRAWFORD walked back along the street and turned in at the hotel. The words Gaftus Wilhelm II had been molded into the concrete hitching posts. Like every other substantial building in Bokovo, the hotel had been built in the days when Tanganyika was German East Africa. He walked along the whitewashed cobbles and stopped by a U.S. Army recon car that had been driven up beside the front steps. The car's numbers and insignia were obliterated by daubs of gray paint, and across the side, in fresh lettering, was the inscription "Columbia Ethnological Safari."

Crawford's eyes swept the upper veranda and saw Runkhammer looking down on him, his elbows on the railing, a glass in one hand and a cigar in the other. Behind him, with his perennially juvenile look, stood Ed Foley. Crawford lifted his hand in a salute with his fingers forming a circle to indicate that he'd tied things up with the commissioner, then he waited with one foot on the rear bumper of the car while a young man with wavy yellow hair came down the hotel steps with a metal case in his hands.

"Hello, Leskawitz."

"Hot!" Leskawitz said.

"Yeah. What's that you're carrying, a typewriter?"

"Wire recorder." He climbed with it inside the car and very carefully put it away. "I don't know what we'd do if anything happened to this one. Fungus ate the guts out of the others."

"What do you need of wire recorders?"

"We record their songs, dances, stories, stuff like that. In Nyroanga we'll get fetish chants, chiefly. We'd like to get some on film, too, only they'll be inside or at night so we won't have a chance." He climbed out and wiped sweat off his face with a handkerchief. "You seen much

of the voodoo since you've been in Africa, Crawford?"

"I've seen a few things. Not here so much as over in Dahomey. There's a voodoo hell for you—Dahomey. How did you happen to choose Tanganyika instead?"

"Dahomey has been pretty well covered. Three major expeditions and a flock of private ones. Don't mention this, because it's something of a secret, but Sprague wants to follow up that old German government report on them bringing the dead back to life."

"The hell!" Crawford laughed. He took off his topee, fingered his damp hair, and laughed some more. "I didn't think Doc Sprague was the sort you could sell a bill of goods like that."

"I didn't say he believed it. You see, he's something of an expert on those things. He investigated the zombi cults down in Haiti. Wants to follow it up. All our New World voodoo has its roots in Africa. Went over with the blacks in the slave ships. Interesting study."

"Doc convinced they *don't* bring the dead ones up?"

He looked surprised. "Aren't you?"

"You're damn betcha I am! Can't sell any zombis to me. Strange, though, the hardheaded customers that *do* believe it. Want to know one?" He'd lowered his voice. "Runkhammer up there. Get him started sometime. He's not so certain but what he's one of the walking dead himself. He took a British three-o-three through the heart one time.'

"You're joking. How—"

"Ask him about it. He'll be good for half the night. He could help you out in Nyroanga, too. You know, those fetishers are gun-shy about showing their grade-A stuff to a bunch of strange white men. Government might come along and make 'em shut up shop. Did you say any more to Sprague about taking us along?"

"I tried, just like you asked me to, but it's no soap."

Crawford laughed until young Leskawitz asked what was so funny.

"Oh, a fellow just said that to me. He was a barber."

Leskawitz laughed, too. Then he said, "If it'd been

just you, maybe Sprague would have said yes. It's that Britisher. The Hammer. He has a bad reputation."

"Bad companions have been the ruination of me."

Leskawitz walked in with him. He was a modest boy who disliked hurting anyone's feelings, so he kept trying to explain.

"Our travel permit limits us to just the present party, and that concession owner, Clifton, is a strange duck. He runs people off. He even tried to make those Methodist missionaries move out. If we tried to take any extras—"

"Sure, kid. I know. Thanks anyhow. We'll just have to give up the idea. Better luck next time."

He went inside the lower veranda. It was dim after the bright sun, so he had to pause for a while in order to see. A half ton or so of expedition equipment had been stacked near the front door, and a muscular, red-faced, middle-aged man was moving it around, checking things off against an inventory sheet.

"Hello, Mason," Crawford said. He made it sound pleasant enough, although he knew that it was this Mason who had put up the chief howl against taking them along to Nyroanga. Because of Mason he had been clipped by the commissioner to the tune of forty shillings. He was about to say something more when Dr. Sprague called to him.

He waited while Dr. Sprague walked from the lounge. Sprague was a tall, spare man of about fifty-five, quite handsome, his china-white hair contrasting with a deeply tanned face.

"Crawford, I'm sorry I couldn't make room for you and your friends, but the way things are stacking up I wouldn't dare take the chance. We've overloaded as it is, almost a month behind schedule, and it's imperative that we make Nyroanga crossing before the rains."

"Oh, sure. Thanks a lot, anyhow."

"No hard feelings?"

"None at all. Don't worry about me, Doc. I'll take care of my end. Leaving tomorrow?"

"This afternoon. Right after siesta. Only we aren't likely to get siesta. We want to make Henreid Wells before nightfall."

"Well, *bon voyage.*"

He climbed the stairs to the second veranda, where Runkhammer and Ed Foley were waiting.

"Would the commissioner talk business?" the Hammer asked.

"*Talk* business! He *gave* me the business. Forty shillings' worth. And by the way, how about your share?"

"Three divided into forty—"

"Three, hell. You'll pay half. You get half the profits, if there are any from this journey, which I doubt. We don't have to go through all that again, do we?"

"You Irish Jew! What the commissioner say?"

"He'll suspend their travel permit. Nyroanga too dangerous. Got to hire competent guides. *Three* guides." He sat down and laughed. "I can't wait until I see that bulldog face of Mason's when they break the news."

Crawford awoke from siesta with the realization that he'd overslept, but he was reassured on seeing Botamba cross-legged in the door.

"Everything under control?"

"The scientists are still here, bwana. A gendarme visited them, and such cursing I have not listened to since the days when the Yankee Army paid a call on Tunisia."

Crawford bathed, put on fresh whites that had just been brought by the laundry boy, and went below. He found Mason and Leskawitz seated disconsolately in a terrace off the bar with empty sundowner glasses on the table in front of them.

"Still here?" Crawford acted surprised. "I thought you'd be to the Wells by now. Say, you'd better get a move on. Those clouds out there have been piling up a little higher every evening. Once they reach the zenith the monsoon will blow in. You ever been through the monsoon in this country? It's thicker than a vat of East St. Louis home brew."

Mason growled something, and Leskawitz looked ready to break down and bawl.

A native boy in a white jacket and his sarong drawn up between his legs, Hindu style, came with a tray to get the empty glasses.

"Brandy and bottled water," Crawford said. "Courvoisier. Be sure of that, Courvoisier, and get the water out of a *bottle,* or I'll tie a knot in somebody's neck. Aye, Allah, I will." He asked the others, "Refill?"

Mason said, "We might as well. We might as well sit here and get stinking drunk."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"That lousy commissioner has rescinded our permit." He struck the table with a big, red fist. "Too dangerous for us, he says. Too dangerous for me, after two years at the headwaters of the Amazon."

Crawford made sounds of deep sympathy. They were on their third drink when Dr. Sprague came in.

"No use?" asked Mason.

"He'll reinstate the permit," Sprague said coldly, his eyes on Crawford, "provided we employ three guides. Three white guides."

Crawford stood up and bowed. "May we apply for the positions? It just happens that Mr. Runkhammer, Mr. Foley, and myself are qualified. Isn't that a coincidence?"

"It certainly is." He pulled a chair over and sat down. "I must say, you sure get what you go after. Am I being too bold when I ask how you accomplished this?"

"Why, Doc, you could get along like that in Africa too, only you attended the wrong college. You should have gone to barber college."

"I don't get it."

"Put it this way: There are two channels for getting things in the colonies—the official channel, and the customary channel. If you choose the official channel you'll need a dredge to clean out the red tape that has accumulated since the days of Queen Victoria. What the hell? I do things the customary way. Cheer up, Sprague. We'll charge you very little. Say, forty shillings. That's the

wholesale price. You can't tell, we might be handy men to have along. I don't want to cause any alarm, but that concessioner, Clifton, has a bad reputation. Man of mystery. I mean that. He's no backwoods latex dripper with ten black wives and his fat belly hanging out of his shirt. He's a regular damned feudal lord. Hup, two, three, spit and polish, all that crap. If you can't lord it over white men, why, go out and lord it over the blacks. Of course, I've never met him, but that's what I heard. He's a Nazi, you know. He was damned near Tanganyika's Nazi-in-chief. Friend of Adolf's. Visited Adolf in Berchtesgaden once every year. The colonial government was going to send the militia up there, only the Germans folded and it didn't seem to be worth the bother. I just thought I'd tell you this so you'd know what you were dealing with. He doesn't like visitors. I've heard that some of his visitors never came back."

"Oh, rot!" Mason shouted. He struck the table a blow and got to his feet, apparently tempted to swing his other fist to Crawford's jaw. "We may have to take you, but we're not fools enough to believe you're doing us a favor."

Chapter Fifteen

THEY set out at dawn in three automobiles, all four-wheel drives as demanded by the roads of that region —the recon car, a jeep, and a one-ton lorry. Badly overloaded because of extra passengers and supplies, they were only as far as Henreid Wells the first day, and at Roanjiji, a village of sheet-metal godowns at some new diamond diggings, on the third. After Roanjiji the road branched itself out of existence.

"Now what would you do without your guides?" Runkhammer asked, and taking the wheel of the recon car drove into the mimosa bush where for endless kilometers the vision was limited to twenty steps ahead of the radiator. But in the morning, after a dry camp, they emerged exactly on their course, only ten or twelve kilos from the sleeping-sickness control station at Wellington.

It was there the monsoon caught them, and it rained intermittently. The road became first muddy, and then bottomless. Native villagers recruited along the way formed long lines on the tow ropes, pulling the cars one kilometer for every three they managed to churn forward on their own. Finally, with the supply of petrol two-thirds exhausted, they descended vast benches to the valley of Nyroanga River.

They were still not near their destination, Nyroanga village and mission, lying in that half-known country near the border of Ruanda.

The bottoms of the Nyroanga proved to be a wilderness of bamboo through which the road meandered, a corduroy floating on the spongy earth. Here and there a trail had been broken by hippos on excursions up from the river, but aside from these the bamboo was impassable.

For the past three days it had rained almost steadily. The Nyroanga, which could be forded with the help of

tow ropes during the late dry season, was now an impassable torrent. The road ran down to the dry-season ford, and ended.

"Guides," said Sprague, laughing bitterly, "what next?"

Crawford said, "We'll have to go on in the old style. You can have these petrol buggies and to hell with them. When a man really wants to get someplace in this back bush, he'd better hire himself some native boys. Those native boys will always get you through."

He found a village of Bantu blacks and recruited a safari. It took two days to repackage the supplies for carrying; then they moved on by easy stages, through bamboo and papyrus flats, to benches brilliant with crimson amaryllis brought out of their long dormancy by the rains, and down to the bottoms again, penetrating ever deeper into the half-known heart of the continent.

Reaching the falls of Nyroanga River, the safari boys refused to go on, explaining that they would require the consent of the Wahima sultan to venture into a country that was taboo to their particular fetish. Argument proved to be useless, and the safari remained stranded in a country where pigmy warriors watched from the trees, and fled like frightened monkeys when anyone tried to approach them.

On the sixth day Crawford returned from up the river in a dugout canoe with four undersized Bantus from a fishing village on Lake Tovo. The following day four more canoes arrived, and the remaining journey was accomplished in less than two days.

Jungle grew in solid walls on both banks of the river. Some half-rotted docks and a canoe float were the only signs that a settlement existed.

The chief of the canoe boys got a paddle wedged between the logs of the float and commenced cackling, "Nyroanga! You see. Nyroanga. Pay boy. Baksheesh! Silver baksheesh!"

Crawford pointed to Sprague, coming up in the next canoe, and said, "There's the man with baksheesh, and you'll get it when this freight is unloaded."

A footpath led up a steep pitch of bank from the dock. He balanced himself in the canoe while strapping the Mauser around his waist, said, "Come along," to Botamba, and started up the path through the bowering hardwoods.

After thirty or forty steps he was confronted by a native wearing trousers and nothing else. The native was tall and muscular; his face was ugly from scar welts; his ear lobes were drawn down to ribbons by the weight of heavy brass rings. Across his two arms he carried a semi-automatic rifle.

He had been plodding along apparently with no thought for trouble. Then, suddenly realizing he was confronted by strangers, he cried out some words in the Wahima dialect and started around with the rifle.

Crawford, acting by reflex, unholstered the Mauser. He could have killed the man, but at the final instant he dropped the muzzle a trifle and the bullet hit the native in the thigh.

It knocked the native's legs from under him. He lit on his side, the rifle discharging at the instant of contact. The bullet was wild overhead. Leaves, cut by its passage, fluttered into the path. The gun had been jarred from his hands. He rolled over, chattering wildly from fear, shock, or pain. He saw Crawford running up the path toward him and scrambled on hands and knees, looking for the rifle, but Crawford planted his foot on it.

"No. Live a while." He bent over and pressed the muzzle of his gun to the native's temple. "You hear? Live a while."

The native froze, his eyeballs rolling white. He cried, "Me good boy. Me *baminga*. Me friend. Me Christian boy learn how pray at mission."

"Now, there's a handy thing for you to know. Did the missionary send you down here with gun? Shoot-'em-up, eh? Black boy got good gun. Gewehr, good gun. Shoots-fast gun. Where'd you get a German automatic rifle?"

Runkhammer, with the Beretta, had followed. With the gun hooked under his arm and an extra clip of twenty

cartridges in his teeth, he held at bay one native with a rifle and about twenty others who, unarmed, had rushed down to see what the shooting was about.

Sprague was there, too, shouting questions.

Crawford said, "How are you on bullet wounds? We'd better patch this fellow up, because it looks like I cut myself a pretty good chunk of leg."

"What happened? Leskawitz, bring the medicine chest. Tell me what—"

"I'll tell you as soon as I know." He waited while Sprague, working skillfully with a tourniquet, got the bleeding checked. "Who sent you down here?" he asked the native. "Bwana Clifton?"

Propped on his elbows, with his leg thrust out for treatment, he said, "Me askari. Guard docks. You understand? Get paid for carry gun. Me good boy."

"Why do you guard the docks?"

"Get paid. Bwana Clifton say—"

"Why does he need the docks guarded?" The black man kept shaking his head. He was unnerved by bullet shock and the sight of his own blood. Crawford put the same question again and again in different ways, until finally Sprague looked up from his task and cried:

"Leave the poor devil alone! Don't you think he's taken enough for a while? Anyhow, Clifton is within his rights to recruit askaris and arm them. You know that as well as I do."

Crawford laughed and said, "I hope I haven't broken any statutes by not letting him shoot me."

He turned and found Mason like a bulldog in his path. "Haven't you any brains?" Mason shouted. "Don't you realize—"

"Get out of my way."

Crawford climbed the footpath and emerged from the river fringe of jungle. A village of mud brick, bamboo, and thatch stood in a double row along the path. Aside from certain signs of antiquity and its large size, there was nothing unusual about it.

As he walked, other buildings came into view. The

Methodist mission was about four kilometers away, a white steeple just visible over the forest. About midway between the native village and the mission were some old-time German government buildings, a reminder of the grandiose von Putlitz scheme that visualized Nyroanga as a key point on the Salaam-to-Congo railway. The buildings looked very fine, rising angular and white among the ornamental banyan trees, but on closer inspection it could be seen that they were rotted-out shells with only their substantial front walls intact. The footpath took no notice of them but led to a slovenly mat, slat, and stucco place almost hidden by faded signs extolling liver pills, vermifuges, and various brands of British and Indian cigarettes.

Crawford waited for Runkhammer and asked, "Is that the Dutchman's place?"

"That's it."

"You lived with him, didn't you?"

"I tried sleeping there one night and the chiggers drove me out. Most of my time I spent keeping watch at the concession. Came down here at night for food and once in a while a bottle, but we didn't get along, him and his highway prices. The swine."

"What's his name?"

"Vanderbosch."

"I think I know him from Mozambique."

They waited for Ed Foley and Botamba and walked through the village. The natives, Bantus, in filthy calico loincloths, seemed harmless enough. They saw no more armed askaris, but Runkhammer kept the submachine gun ready.

"Nobody else knew you were here?" Crawford asked.

"Not that I know of. Unless that Dutch swine talked. I spent little enough time down here. The concession is upriver with a dock of its own. There used to be a little stern-wheel boat come all the way here from Lake Taka. Say, you should see that place of 'is. Clifton's. A regular castle, carved by hand from the local teak. By the Gawd, 'e still has a crew of blacks carving on it. It's the

damnedest thing you ever laid eyes on. Looks like it was made of spirit poles right out of a voodoo hut. I laid there on my belly for the better part of two weeks, looking at it through a set of German glasses. Then there's a voodoo monastery someplace." He waved uncertainly at the forest. "I heard the drums night after night, but I never did get a look at it. Oh, there's more here than meets the eye."

"What brought you up here in the first place?"

"Poverty. I'm a peculiar man. I'm one who likes jingle in his purse. So when I heard about the natives walking around in a stupid trance from too much opium, why, I drifted up."

"To investigate for the U.N."

"You laugh at this badge once too often, chappie, and you'll end up in the willy house charged with some of the black deeds I know you had a hand in."

"Vanderbosch told you about Hitler?"

"Not 'im. No. I run across a couple of bush detectives from Dar es Salaam sent to check on a story that two British big-game hunters told, about seeing Adolf chasing antelope with a Yank jeep. Come right atop him over the brow of a hill. He got that thing around on two wheels, or its driver did, and got away, but not before they recognized him. Of course, those mulatto detectives didn't learn anything. Clifton saw to that. They came down poo-pooin' the whole idea, but by the Gawd, I didn't! I got too good a memory. I recollected how Clifton had set with Adolf, right atop that crow's nest in Berchtesgaden. Sure, I asked Vanderbosch about it, but a hell of a lot of good that did. He'd want to hog it all if he did know. That Dutchman's a fat swine. To hell with him. There I was, my tongue hangin' out like a dog in Aden, and him without even the humanity to spot me a flash of his rotgut schnapps unless I laid cash on the old barrelhead."

"You should have shown him your United Nations badge."

Runkhammer laughed through his clenched, piano-key teeth. "Aye. That I should. I should have walked

down and flashed it on Doc Douval when I saw him fixing to run out instead of lying low, that's what I should have done."

Crawford asked if Douval and Chari had been staying with Clifton, and Runkhammer shook his head.

"They were guests of his pretty steady. I'd think Clifton had his eye on her, but I wouldn't know. He's a Turk among women. He is, for a fact. You know, I've done a lot of thinking about this business in the last weeks, and I reconstructed the whole thing. Here was Douval, doing some scientific thing or other for a museum, and there was Chari rubbing herself around Clifton trying to find out what he was hiding—"

Crawford wheeled and said from the side of his mouth, "I've told you a couple of times—"

"All right, Yank. I didn't say a thing."

The trader, an extremely large, gross man, came from his store and stood with one arm shading his eyes to watch their approach. "Ach!" he cried. "Mynheer Crawford!" He ignored Runkhammer and waddled down some steps while a smile found its way across the vast folds of his face. He wore a dirty blue shirt without a button left on it. He had wadded the front of the shirt together and stuffed it in the top of his pants. The pants were shapeless khakis held up by a piece of heavy twine. On his feet were laceless tennis shoes that forced him to walk with a shuffle, never entirely lifting his feet. "Crawford, after so many years from Mozambique!"

Crawford shook hands with him, and made some ordinary remarks. He had always liked Vanderbosch, and despite his repulsive appearance, enjoyed resuming their old acquaintance.

Vanderbosch said, "So, you remember me, *ja?* You remember your old friends. Dot is goot. A man is no better than a pig who will not remember his old friends."

Runkhammer shouted, " 'E's no better'n a pig who won't spot a fellow white man a bottle of proper schnapps when he's strapped for money in the bush."

Vanderbosch spat, laughed, and shook hands with Ed

Foley. Then he walked to the house with an arm resting on Crawford's shoulder.

"Nine years! Nine years older, nine years fatter, nine years closer to death. Be careful the broken board. Come in, come in. And bring your friends. Everyone welcome at the store of Vanderbosch. *Ja.* White men must stick together in the jungle. Schnapps. Goot English schnapps I have. Vanderbosch, the trader of ten-cent machetes, has goot schnapps for his friends. So you see he lies, that Englishman." He held up his fingers to count, *"Vijf, zes, zeven* bottles of schnapps he drank, and all the time in his pocket was money but not a shilling for Vanderbosch. This is the man who slept in mine bed, who ate good food—"

Runkhammer, reaching the Beretta, swung it at his head. It was unexpected, and Vanderbosch had no chance to fend it off, but reflex made him drop his head, and he took part of the blow with his shoulder.

He sagged to both knees, momentarily stunned.

"You fat Dutch pig!" Runkhammer shouted.

Crawford rammed him back and said, "What the hell is wrong with you? You had no reason to do that."

"I'm not taking that kind of lip from him or anybody else." He bellowed over Crawford's shoulder to Vanderbosch, "You hear me, you filthy hog? I'll not take that talk from you or anyone else."

Vanderbosch seemed to be dizzy from the blow, so Crawford walked inside with him. "Come," the trader said, slap-slapping through the amorphous, cluttered mess of the store. "You come. I haff easy chair out back."

He seated Crawford on a rattan rocking chair. The others had not followed. "I'm all right. All Dutchmen have thick skull. Sometime I will kill that man who treat me so. It is true, he was here for two weeks, drinking mine schnapps, eating mine food, canned beef yet at two shillings each I never get paid, and yet he talks about how stingy—"

"Yeah. You got to take Runkhammer as he is." Crawford leaned back in the chair. Looking through the door

he could see Runkhammer, Foley, and big Botamba seated on the front porch. "Know why we're here, Van?"

Vanderbosch wet a towel and wrapped it turbanlike around his close-cropped head. "Perhaps you come to get shot for snooping around concession, *ja?*"

"What's going on at that place, Van?"

"I run my business. I stay alive. How? By not getting too curious about Clifton."

"Is Hitler up there?"

He laughed with a big shake of his body. *"U schertst!"* he said.

"No, I'm not joking. I want to know if he's up there."

"Listen. For six years I haff been here, running mine place, taking care of mine own business, getting fat, growing old. In that time not once haff I been closer than one-two kilometers to the big house. Not once, mynheer. But you ask me, I say no. Hitler is dead. He is not here."

"Why was Dr. Douval here?"

"Douval?" He had to think for a while before remembering. "Oh, the Frenchman. Who knows? He stayed with Reverend Heggrie."

"At the Mission?"

"Ja."

"Douval left here with something in a package. What in hell would he be carrying?"

"Maybe his lunch. Here, have a drink." He laughed with his whole body, and one-handed, using the other to hold on his wet turban, poured liquor in tin cups.

"That was pretty funny, Van, and there's only one reason I don't laugh about it. It's because this package was worth plenty of dollars, and plenty of dollars is no joking matter. What does Clifton produce up there? How does he make his dough?"

"Dough? Monies? A man needs now money in tropics? Here one needs only a shirt, pants, a banana."

"Yeah, but Clifton goes first class. Every year a trip to Europe, room and a bath, egg in a glass, that sort of stuff. What's this about a couple hundred natives inside his concession walking around like they were asleep? Is he

raising poppies and sending the crude opium out by way of Kriongao to—"

He stopped seeing the sudden pallor of Vanderbosch's face. Vanderbosch sat down in a rattan chair. For a moment Crawford thought it was the effect of the blow, then he decided it was something he'd said.

"Say, what's the trouble?"

Vanderbosch moved forward, his weight creaking the chair, his legs bent so they looked short like the legs of a squatting toad with his fat belly above.

"Nothing. Only you were talking about the walking dead."

It gave Crawford a peculiar jolt. It always did to find a white man in fear of a voodoo belief.

"Oh, hell, Van!"

"For eight years I haff sat here and listened to the drums at the fetish town. Eight long years. I haff a black wife. Sometimes, for all night, she is not here. At morning she comes home, she has been at the fetish town. I ask and she tells me nothing. She is frightened. Look at me, mynheer. When a native is frightened you can see it in his eyes. At last I would know. *Gott!* I would know!" He drove his fist to the arm of the chair. "I whipped her. With hippo whip, I whipped her. I said, 'Tell me, woman, what goes on in that black hole of sorcery?' And she told me, mynheer. There was a boy. He was about seventeen. He was bitten by a mamba and he died. But his grave was open, and in the fetish house she saw him. Breathing. Alive, but with dead eyes. The fetishers had blown the life without soul through his nostrils. *Ja.* And when will he die again? I will tell you. Never! Never! I haff seen them over the compound fence, working in the rubber groves, dead-eyed without souls. I tell you there are men in Nyroanga who haff moved without souls for two hundred years."

The effort had winded him. He lay back in the chair and got his breath. Sweat ran down the vast sides of his face, down his neck, and joined in the middle of his hairless chest.

"Oh, Van, use your head!"

He managed a smile. "Daylight. The goot, yellow sun. *Ja.* By daylight with good schnapps we do not believe. But by night! By night it is different, eh, Crawford? When the black caves of the mind take over. *Ja.* It is not goot that white man think of the black gods, or else he will become native himself." He changed the subject. "I haff heard there is a safari with you."

They discussed the expedition through another schnapps. Then Crawford got up to leave.

"Sure you won't tell me what it is Clifton's hiding up there?"

"I told you already—"

"Yeah. I don't blame you. But think it over. I'll cut you in, if it's worth while."

"That Runkhammer—"

"Forget Runkhammer. I'll get him in line. If I say so, we cut you in."

"*Ja.* You will be guests at Clifton's house. It is always so—the guest at the mission becomes the grand guest for a banquet at the big house. Watch when you are there. Watch for a table servant called Mombu. Only look in his eyes, mynheer."

He was halfway to the door, wanting to laugh off the Dutchman's superstition, but he was unable not to turn and ask, "Why?"

"Hear me. Fifteen years ago this Mombu was hanged for killing an English army officer at Shambe. That is up in the Palu, by Nyanza. The fetish priests there, and these here, are of the same monastery, you understand? Well. He was hanged by the neck. Dead, and underground, sitting up like the native fashion. But that night he was raised by the fetishers, and life was breathed into him. So the story was around, and his relatives came weeping to the commanding officer, a man named Wetherby, saying, 'Get our poor Mombu, it is not enough that you hang him so his neck is stretched out long like a cockerel's, but you would enslave him forever, too?' Understand I was not there, Mynheer Crawford, but it

was told to me by Kermit Everwijn, a man of God, a holy missionary. So. For two nights, two days, steady, the fetish drums, and the weeping relatives. So mynheer commander said, 'I will open the grave and prove to you he is there. Then you can go home.' And this was done. But behold me as I stand across this room from you drinking schnapps—the grave was empty. *Ja.* And five years later this missionary, Kermit Everwijn, saw this Mombu. Walking, breathing. Where? At Mynheer Clifton's. And he said to himself, 'Reverend Kermit Everwijn, you are a fool. This is not Mombu, whom they hanged. This is some other black man. This man is alive.' But when he looked in his eyes! *Mynheer Gott!* His eyes! Flat, and dead, through the dust of the grave!"

He grabbed the schnapps bottle. There was only a heel left in it. He drained it and hurled it. It struck a hardwood wall pillar, shattering, spinning chunks of glass across the dirt-clotted mattings.

"Schnapps!" he cried hoarsely.

There was a jingle of ankle links, and an old houseboy with white woolly hair entered, drawing the cork from a fresh bottle. Vanderbosch saw Runkhammer and Foley looking in through the front windows, and lowered his voice.

"Stay with me a while." He waited for the old houseboy to jangle his bracelets out of the room. "Those natives. Even old Ngando. Sometimes I look in their eyes, and it is like the depths of time you see in the black crystal of a Hindu fortuneteller, and I fear them. Sometimes I wake up at night, and there is mine own wife, sitting, looking at me. I spring up and look back at the bed for fear I am dead already. Do not misunderstand me. I am not afraid to die. Not just to die. What I fear it that my woman will take me to the fetish village and make me like Mombu. You think I am crazy?"

Crawford felt hot and dirty. He wanted to be out of the place. He said, "No, Van."

"Hear me, you are a white man. In this country, you cannot turn your back on a white man who needs you.

Listen, if I die I want to be cremated in fire." He poured schnapps, bent over a table, resting one elbow to keep from shaking. He drank and lowered the glass with his lips shiny. He managed a Gargantuan chuckle. "I would perhaps burn goot, eh, mynheer?"

Chapter Sixteen

IT WAS raining again. At the canoe dock the scientists were trying to get their equipment under canvas.

"How long does this last?" Sprague asked.

Crawford shrugged and remarked something about the monsoon being worse there, on the flanks of the mountains, than at the coast. "There's a big rest house up there with a tile roof still intact. We'd better get some boys together and move this stuff."

The rest house, a two-story building, had once been the home of the German resident, and since had been restored by the British, but it was dilapidated, and rain found its way through the tiles. They were still getting things moved around under the better portions of the roof when the Reverend Heggrie walked down from the Methodist mission with a barefoot W'tusi convert holding a silk umbrella over his head.

Heggrie was an ample man of fifty with the voice of a minister but without that self-righteousness which is the blight of his profession. He invited them to dinner, would listen to no refusal, and led them back through evening drizzle to his dwelling in the mission compound. Mrs. Heggrie, a sallow woman in a black dress, greeted them.

Heggrie asked her, "Has Willa come yet?" and was told that she had not. There were some stiffly formal minutes of waiting.

Heggrie finally said, "My ward—Miss Quilter. We've taken care of her since her father died, poor girl."

"Poor girl!" Mrs. Heggrie said with a sudden light in her eyes. "*There* is a young lady who needs to be taught a lesson!"

"Turn her over to Crawford!" Runkhammer said, guffawing.

Heggrie chose to ignore him. "Now, Irma!" he said in mild reproof. "Don't forget you were a girl once."

No more mention was made of her, but their worry was obvious, stifling attempts at conversation. In one corner of the room, Runkhammer was talking to Ed Foley, retelling his favorite story of the Episcopal bishop who, intending to deliver a baccalaureate at a Sudanese seminary, got in the sultan's harem by mistake. The bishop's adventures were sprightly, but Runkhammer was never adept at *sotto voce,* with the result that Crawford and Sprague felt obligated to shout him down.

A stormy darkness moved in, and Mrs. Heggrie lighted the petrol lamps. There was an odor of cook fires in the native town, strong and smudgy. Distant tom-toms commenced to mutter, muffled by dampness.

"Week of the rain fetish," Heggrie said. Then with an embarrassed laugh, "You see, I have grown almost as familiar with the native religion as with my own."

Sprague brightened and started to put a question, but Runkhammer's voice shouted him down:

"How are the prophets of Israel doing against the black voodoo these days, Reverend? You getting so many converts it's putting 'em out of business?"

Heggrie cleared his throat and said, "A man can accomplish just so much in a lifetime. The souls of these poor people have been held in bondage for too many years."

Sprague asked, "Just where is the fetish town?"

"You take a footpath through the bush. It's only about two miles."

Mrs. Heggrie said, "If they would only send us a bell! I mean a bell so loud it would drown out the drums."

"Yes." Heggrie smiled. "Mother and her bell!"

She went on in a loud voice, "Ever since I came I've tried to get them to send us a bell. I'd ring it every night. Clang! Clang!"

Runkhammer roared, "That's the spirit, Mrs. Heggrie! The trouble with Christians is they make their religion sound so dull no African wants to associate with it."

Heggrie said coldly, "*Many* Africans wish to associate with it."

Sprague asked, "Is it safe to go over there?"

"Eh?" Heggrie snapped shut the case of his watch and put it away. "Why, I think so. I have been there. It was several years ago. I went over to see one of my converts who had fallen into a fit. They accept Christ, you know, but they keep sneaking over there to consult the *Vo* just the same."

"Did you get to see him?"

"Oh, yes. They made no trouble. He was in the hut of the Sabata fetish. They are mud huts, you know, perfectly dome-shaped, with tunnel entrances. This one was fantastically dirty. And the odor! Gentlemen, I was in the First World War, and there's nothing I can compare it to so much as the stench of a gas attack. But I kept going and there was this poor lad, Ikoro, lying on a heap of filthy skins with a hippo-oil lamp burning over him. An old man was in the room, beating a tom-tom with a pair of bent sticks. He didn't even seem to see me. Not even when I picked the poor boy up in my arms and carried him out. It was fantastic."

Sprague asked, "What had they done to him?"

"Why, nothing. He kept complaining that a sorcerer was trying to break his neck. He walked around here for months with his head bent to one side and the vertabrae bulging out. When our circuit doctor came I asked him to look at him, but there was no break, of course. His neck was permanently deformed. Force of suggestion, poor fellow."

Runkhammer said, "Ever think that a sorcerer *might* have tried to twist his neck off and the fetish priest saved him?"

Heggrie laughed nervously and said, "Oh, come!"

"Say, I been on the Gold Coast, and I been in Dahomey, and the things I've seen in those fetish huts make me go easy laughing at sorcery or anything else. Sorcery can make you die or it can make you live. Sometimes living and dying is just a state of mind. What would you say, Reverend, if I was to tell you that I'm alive today because of a fetisher?"

"I would say you were a fortunate man."

"Well, that's what happend. It's the only way I can figure it. I was shot through the heart with a British three-o-three."

"Oh, come, now."

Runkhammer, in response, stripped off his shirt. He was magnificently muscled and tattooed. A puckered scar entered his chest barely to the left of his breastbone. He turned and showed a slightly larger scar in his back.

Heggrie wanted to ignore it, but Sprague cried, "Look at this, Mason! Have you ever seen anything like this?"

Runkhammer, in his glory, told the whole story, not omitting its conclusion, in which he described himself rising from his Suez hospital bed, garbed only in a gown that "came to m' navel with rather less'n 'arf o' that behind, like Kipling said," and amid screaming nurses strode from the place and never went near a pill roller since.

They finally sat down to the meal without Willa Quilter. It consisted of chicken prepared after the Arabic manner, yellow with saffron, a rather fibrous bread of pounded cassava, a salad of greens and bananas drenched with palm-nut oil, and, as a special treat, some tiny boiled potatoes.

The sound of a claxon brought silence to the table. While they listened a car motor came close and was shut off, a door slammed, and there were feet stamping mud on the stoop. A native boy came running to open the door, and a white man and woman came in.

The woman was about twenty, large, blonde, and colorless. The man was at least forty-five, lean-faced, with a long British upper lip.

Heggrie cried, "Mr. Clifton! Thank God she's with you."

Clifton laughed politely and took off his trench coat. It occurred to Crawford that the coat was like the one Hitler wore in all the photographs taken of him during his rise to power. He was neither tall nor short, light nor heavy. He was as near average as a person could be, yet

there was something physically spectacular about him. It was his manner, his way of standing.

He took the girl's waterproofs, shook them, and watched the boy hang them up. He turned then with a smile to address Heggrie.

"Oh, I say, it's quite all right. Nothing to be alarmed about. People come to no harm here. We have it too well policed."

Despite the banter he affected, his voice had a frigid quality. He spoke with a good accent, but it was cultivated rather than natural, and once in a while the brassy twist of a word revealed his cockney origin.

Walking over beneath the petrol lamp, he nodded all around, and motioned back Heggrie's attempt to introduce him.

"I'm George Clifton," he said. Then, singling out Dr. Sprague, "You are Sprague."

Sprague was momentarily surprised. "Why, yes," he said, and they shook hands.

"I recognized you from your photograph in the *London Illustrated News,* but I didn't realize you'd be here this morning or I'd have been at the canoe float to greet you."

Crawford said, "That's quite all right, chappie. Your man was there."

There was no change in Clifton's face as he turned to regard him. "It was you who shot my boy."

"Yeah. I knocked him down. I didn't kill him. Not killing him was a matter of choice. I wanted you to know that."

"You used good judgment." It was hard to tell exactly what he meant. He had a way of saying just words with no particular expression behind them. He took in everyone as he went on, "You are my guests here. I'm fully cognizant of that. Since you are guests, I don't like to remonstrate. However, let me say this: I am perfectly within my legal rights in arming a police force, and the askari was within his rights this morning."

"Within his rights if he chose to kill me?" Crawford laughed.

"That, I suppose, depends on a number of factors."

"How far beyond your concession lines do these police powers of yours extend?"

"To be exact, you have been enjoying my hospitality since the instant you set foot on shore this morning."

He dropped the subject then. He sat down across from Willa, refusing dinner but taking coffee, which he drank half extract and honey—sirupy, bitter, and cold.

Through a momentary lull in the conversation, the drums came through. They weren't loud, but one of the deep ones sent an impulse that rattled a metallic object on the shelf.

"If I only had a bell!" Mrs. Heggrie said. "What I want is a great, brass bell. A bell so big it would take two of us to lift it. A bell with a sledge for a clapper. Clang! Clang! Oh, then I would drown out the drums. Every night I would drown out the drums. They would come to Christ if I had a bell to beat down those drums of the devil!"

Clifton said, "And I'll get you a bell, Mrs. Heggrie. I promise it. The next time I go outside, I'll buy you your bell."

Heggrie said, "I'll get something on the wireless."

"No," said Sprague. "If you don't mind." He was concentrating on the rhythm of the drums. "Why, Mason, that's very nearly that Haiti rhythm. Yes, by George, it is! The small drums in the background make it sound different." He explained to Clifton, "We were down in Haiti investigating that zombi business for their government. It had so taken hold of the natives that whole plantations had to close down. We used to hear those drums across the cane fields and in the jungles, but they were like will-o'-the-wisps to track down. You see, the voodoo priests there were afraid of being thrown into prison, so we didn't get as far as we would otherwise."

Heggrie said, "Surely you, a scientist, would not lend credence to any such ridiculous thing as a zombi!"

Runkhammer said, "He came halfway around the world to see it—he put that much credence in it."

"The interesting thing, to me, is that *they* believe it," Sprague said. Then back to Clifton, "You are familiar with the fetish town. That is, could you—"

"You'd like me to take you over there?"

"Tonight?"

Clifton was slightly taken aback. "Why, very well. Tonight."

Chapter Seventeen

CRAWFORD and the others watched from the front steps as Clifton and Sprague were driven away in a jeep by a stupid-acting native driver. Then, saying good night to the Heggries, and with a lantern boy leading them, they returned to the rest house and worked through half the night storing the equipment away, safe from the rains.

Crawford had his shoes off, treating his toenails with merthiolate in daily precaution against egg-laying chiggers, when Sprague returned, his clothes still reeking from the stench of the fetish huts.

"Big spread?" Crawford asked.

"Why, yes. Amazing. In size, that is. Truly amazing."

"Did you see anything new?"

"Oh, no. It was very ordinary as far as ritual was concerned, but of course one cannot always judge. But its size! I would conservatively guess there are fifty huts, half a dozen of them very large. Clifton assures me that ailing native chieftains have been carried here on *tepois* from distances as far as eight hundred kilometers to be treated by the fetishers. Astounding."

"You should have taken your Lifebuoy along."

"Do I stink?"

"Well, judging by what you carried out on your clothes, I'd say it must be like the Ubangi meat stall the French tell about up around Bangui—it smelled so strong the tricolor went limp during a high wind."

"Evils of the trade, evils of the trade," he said.

"Say, Doc, did you notice anything funny about that driver?"

He spun with a suddenness that indicated he had. "Why, what do you mean?"

"He acted groggy—like a sleepwalker. Did you look in his eyes?"

"No." He returned and asked, "Why? Why did you ask me that?"

"Oh, it's so damned silly." Crawford suddenly felt like a fool. "I was over to the Dutchman's this afternoon. He's convinced that they're raising the dead out there. He's so convinced that he wants somebody to stick around and cremate him when he dies. Specifically, he says there's a native out at the concession, a fellow by the name of Mombu, that the British hanged five or ten years ago up around Nyanza. Well, I thought maybe the driver—"

"He called this native by name, but it wasn't Mombu. Did he say anything else?"

"Nothing much, except he has it in his head that Clifton is running his whole plantation with that kind of scab labor."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot. I'll—be discreet about it. I'll keep my eyes open. Keep you advised. Ah—by the way, do *you* believe in it?"

"Me?" Crawford laughed. "Oh, Allah!"

Sprague said, "We'll be going up there in a few days. I'll see to it that you come along. Clifton knew I was somewhat disappointed about tonight. He has promised me something spectacular."

Four days went by before Clifton made good his promise and came for them in his jeep. It was late afternoon and this time he was driving himself.

He strode inside the rest house and stood impatiently slapping at the tops of his boots with the butt of his fly whisk when Crawford, noticing his arrival, hurried over from the store.

They exchanged greetings, Clifton told why he had come, and Crawford sent Botamba running to find Sprague and the two other members of his party.

"You'll come too, of course," Clifton said with a polite bob of his head. "And your friends, Foley and Runkhammer."

Runkhammer that morning had started out with a

blanket and canvas sheet on his back "to have a chat with Adolf," and he might not return for days.

Crawford said casually, "Runkhammer isn't here, but I'll tell Foley. And I'd like to take my boy along."

"Oh, by all means. I never object to my guests bringing servants with them. A good servant is hard to find, and it's a blighted bother trying to tell a strange boy every move to make. Besides, you might be there some time. I have no idea how long the fetishers will take. They might not finish for a couple of days. We had a *m'deup* girl once who kept going for three days and three nights before the trance hit her. It was astounding. And she was a small girl, too. Went on her nerves."

"What are they performing—the rain dances?"

"Oh, I pay little attention to such rituals. I'm afraid I'm a very practical individual from Sprague's standpoint. I take interest in the native rituals only for my own ends. In this instance there has been some thievery at the estate, and I thought I'd let the fetishers get the culprit for me—and entertain the ethnologists at the same time. Two birds with one stone. Where did you say Runkhammer was?"

"I didn't, and I don't know. I think he has a woman down in the village. If he's there, he'll be full of arrack wine and in no condition to take along."

"He'll not take it amiss if we leave him?"

"To hell with him."

There was no indication that Clifton was suspicious, but there wouldn't be. Clifton had a wooden face; he was a perfect master of his emotions, if, indeed, he had any.

There was a delay while Mason and Leskawitz packed the wire recorder, hand generator, and motion-picture equipment, and the sun was dropping through the purple mists of the mountain horizon when the jeep got under way, its big mud wheels slip-sliding easily along water-filled ruts into the forest.

They emerged some miles later with a view of savannas, broken here and there by mimosa, or by a stub-ugly

baobab tree. The river came in sight. There were some docks and a couple of metal-covered storehouses; then the car pulled up and waited at a barbed-wire fence.

A native in a long calico gown emerged from a crib-log pillbox, and after recognizing Clifton's signal, leaned his rifle against the wall and shuffled down to open the padlock by means of a big brass key he had strung around his waist.

Like the driver of a few nights before, he had a stunned, mechanical manner, making Crawford and Sprague exchange glances.

The concession house stood on a fine sweep of hillside, its front with six Grecian pillars facing the east. It was three stories high, a peculiar hodgepodge of architecture, African and European, ancient and modern. Together with its connected houses, it covered about an acre. It had several gables, some much steeper than others, some curved after the Oriental manner, others quite plain. It gave the appearance of having been built at different times, and from different inspirations, but still the composite hung together well enough.

Clifton said, "You are smiling at my dream book of architecture, Doctor? The native craftsmen had a hand in its design. I believe in fostering their creativeness."

"That's hand carving?" asked Sprague. "Would you mind if I photographed it?"

"Not at all. I think you'll find the detail quite interesting."

The jeep halted at a compound wall. The wall was made of pointed hardwood pickets set in the ground and strung together with barbed wire. The area it enclosed was itself a small estate. Besides the house and outbuildings it contained both garden and orchard, and a native village of neat, gabled huts with a background of *miomba* trees whose shadows looked almost black in the sunset.

Clifton drove up to the front entrance, where a black man in a servant's coat waited to open the doors. They entered a screened terrace, passed through a short hallway, and were in the main room of the house.

It was of heroic size. It was two stories in height, roughly hexagonal. In its exact center, like the center pole of a pyramid tent, was a massive tree trunk. Its brace roots, still intact, broke upward through the floor; its first branches served as the rafters of the ceiling; its bark had been rendered hard and vitreous by coatings of copal gum. The room was lighted by hanging metal baskets in which a woody material burned with a white, almost smokeless flame. There were light bulbs on drop cords, but none of them were on. The effect of the lighting was to make the room seem cavernous, its walls shifting and remote.

Clifton, smiling, slapped the tops of his boots with his fly whisk and said, "Eh? Well, what do you say? Does it remind you of Act One of *Die Walküre*?"

"It *is* Wagnerian," Sprague said. "Did you just find the tree here and build the house around it?"

"Exactly! It was a magnificent thing, the finest in all the country, a local variety of teak. I was going to use it for one of the main pillars, but I didn't have the heart to have it cut down. It goes all the way through and forms a support for the main gable."

Clifton rang for a boy, gave him some instructions, and sent him hurrying off. Somewhere, deep in the house, a lute was playing, and a woman sang one of the sad, chanting Berber songs of the desert lands, far to the north.

"Scotch?" asked Clifton, and made drinks with Clan Royal and bottled fizz.

Crawford, lifting his drink, saw a woman enter. She had stopped abruptly and was staring at him. He was looking into the startled and lovely face of Chari Douval.

She wore a dress rather than her usual shirt and shorts. It made her look taller, imcomparably more feminine. Her waist seemed slimmer, her breasts larger. It gave her a new softness. Her hair was different, too. It was pulled back, not tightly, but enough to make her ears visible. It was fastened by a scarlet silk ribbon, and it fell in large loose ringlets across her shoulders. Diamonds, tiny

diamonds, made points of twinkle in the small lobes of her ears. In the candlelight her skin seemed very dark. She'd compressed her lips; he could see the quickness of her breathing.

Clifton said, "Chari—Mrs. Douval." He walked to her, told her that she looked beautiful, and introduced her to each in turn. She had control of herself again, and gave no indication of ever having met Crawford or Ed Foley before.

"Oh, by the way," Clifton said to Sprague, "Mrs. Douval's husband is also a scientist. He's with the Académie Nationale. A naturalist. I thought perhaps you might know him."

The name meant nothing to Sprague, but Mason seemed to remember some motion pictures taken by a Douval of the Académie that had been on loan to Stanford University.

After another drink, they went into a low-ceilinged room where dinner was served.

"Douval," said Crawford. "How do you spell it?"

Very carefully she spelled it for him.

"Is your husband here, Mrs. Douval?"

"My husban' is in field. Gathering specimens."

"Do you expect him tonight?"

"Perhaps, but I rather theenk I will go to him."

It occurred to him that Douval was not with her. She had left him in Banqui, or Brazzaville. She had come here alone. Clifton! "He's a turk for women," Runkhammer had said. It tied a knot in his intestines; he went sweaty and cold.

He forced himself to eat. The soup was excellent. He wanted to hurl it in Clifton's leathery British face.

He pushed the soup away, lighted a cigarette, and tossed the burned match in it.

Just then some drums started to mutter, so he said, "There it is, Leskawitz. Better get your wire recorder going."

Clifton, with his eyes on the burned-out match floating in the soup, said, "If this dinner bores you—"

"Nothing around here exactly bores me, chappie."

Ed Foley said, "For God's sake, Crawford!"

Crawford tilted on the rear legs of his chair, head turned, one eye closed against the cigarette smoke, and listened to the drum rhythm. It sounded like the start of a *m'deup* dance. He noticed that Sprague, his spoon balanced expertly in his fingers, was watching something beyond Clifton's head. He looked and saw a heavy-shouldered native with a blunt, dull face bending over to take Clifton's soup plate. Chari was seated at Clifton's right. She was rigid. She seemed to have shrunk in her chair. The native's brown arm, moving slowly, came within an inch of her shoulder. Her eyes rolled and watched. Then he moved back, and she breathed again. A second servant came in, swinging the door to the serving pantry. Hearing the door, and thinking the native was gone, she glanced up. He was there and she looked directly into his face.

She sprang up, clapped both hands across her mouth, and screamed.

The black man shuffled off. The brass rings on his ankles clank-clanked so that he sounded like a man in chains. He stopped midway between Clifton's chair and the door, and Clifton, getting to his feet, said, "That's enough, Mombu. Go out."

It was Mombu. Crawford walked around the table, trying to reach Chari's side, but Clifton was there ahead of him.

"Girl, did he startle you? It was only Mombu. You have seen him a hundred times."

She was sobbing with both hands in front of her face. In French she said something about his eyes.

"Yes, but it's nothing. He's had trachoma. It took the pigment out of them. He can't even see in the light. It's nothing, girl."

She recovered herself. "Excuse me!" she whispered. "I can't eat. I weesh to be alone. Do you min'? I need a leetle fresh air."

She was not in sight when they left the dining room. At Clifton's suggestion they all walked to the fetishers' camp.

Sprague, falling in beside Crawford, said, "Mombu—was he the one?"

"Yes."

"Did you see his eyes?"

"No. Is it possible for trachoma to take their color away?"

"I doubt it. But something else might."

Sprague kept smiling at him, and it irked Crawford a little. "No, damn it, I *don't* think he's a zombi."

"I hope you don't. If *you* believe it, there'll be little enough hope for the rest of us."

Chapter Eighteen

THE FETISHERS had a fire burning in an open area screened on three sides by big hardwoods. Back of the fire stood a dome-shaped fetish hut of mud bricks so small it could not possibly accommodate more than two men, and those at a crouch. The drum beaters squatted in a quarter circle. There were eleven drums and two balafos, or native marimbas. A large hippo drum that boomed deeply at a distance seemed to diminish in volume as they came close, and there the smaller ones arrested themselves.

Crawford said, "I understand all this is to catch a thief."

"The *m'deup* girl is supposed to give his name. Afterward it's up to the fetishers to bring him here. A good trick."

"If they can do it."

"Lay a little bet?"

Crawford thought about it and refused. "No. That's your game. I never bet on the other man's game."

The tempo of the drums shifted from time to time, and it was quite intricate, with one group maintaining a beat that meshed at intervals with the beat of another group, creating a cross rhythm, a rocking effect. The bodies of the beaters were oiled, and they gleamed like polished ebony in the firelight. They weaved and bent, swinging with the endless rhythm, hypnotized by the drums. A fetish priest, garbed in raffia and a faceless mask of goatskin, crawled from the hut and did a dance that consisted chiefly of postures. In time he was joined by a second priest, and by a third.

After half an hour of such preliminary incantations, one of the fetishers cried out wildly. It was a signal, bringing a new impulse from the tom-toms. Four women advanced at a run, dragging a girl. She struggled, not to

escape, but as a part of the ritual. The women released her to the fetisher, and he thrust her into the firelight, where she started to dance.

She was a tall girl, with strong legs and hips. She had thick, protruding lips and very flat nostrils, but still she was handsome. She was naked, except for a circlet chain strung with tiny white cowrie shells beneath the smooth bulge of her abdomen.

She danced with small movements like the fetishers before her. She postured with her head back, her shoulders back, her breasts and their firm nipples toward the sky. She stroked her abdomen and moved sinuously. Then, by degrees, she brought her legs and hips and shoulders into the dance. It was a process of placing more and more of her body under the will of the drums, until at last she danced through no apparent will of her own.

She danced on and on, monotonously. Crawford kept thinking of Chari. He left the grove. An askari with a rifle cradled in his arms followed him. Other armed askaris guarded the compound wall. It gave him a bad feeling. He kept rubbing the spot where his Mauser pistol should have been. Being a guest, he had not been able to bring it. It occurred to him that he could have smuggled it through in Sprague's equipment, but now it was too late.

He retraced his steps, lost the askari, and, wanting a view of the estate, removed his shoes and climbed to the windy top of a tall hardwood.

The moon, just sliding through rain clouds, illuminated miles of country—forest and savanna, the angular patchwork of fields and shambas.

A road wound over grasslands and disappeared. A side track branched from it and dipped from sight in a cut between the hills. Following the track's natural continuation, his eyes rested on a point of light. It was a lighted window. Then he made out a house and some long, narrow sheds forming a quadrangle surrounded by a dense growth of mimosa.

He watched for half an hour. The moon was covered

by cloud, and rain started. He could still see the light. A shadow moved in front of it. Then there was another light, creeping, disappearing in mimosa, coming in sight again. The headlamps of a car.

The car did not reappear from between the hills. It took some other road, to some other destination. He stayed aloft for an hour, and came down soaked and cold.

He had another glance at the *m'deup* girl. She showed no sign of tiring. He located Ed Foley and Botamba and suggested that they find a bed for the night.

"Somebody else is here on the estate, all right," he said. "House out there. Car lights."

"You still think it's Adolf?"

"No. I have an idea it's Douval, getting another bagful."

"Of what?"

Crawford laughed.

"Clifton would know he was here," Eddie said.

"Of course."

"Well, why would he smuggle it out through those sinkholes on the Belgian side?"

"I don't need a man who can ask questions, Eddie. I need a man who has the answers."

Crawford had hoped to prowl the house in search of Chari, but in the darkness of the screened terrace Clifton squeezed out his cigarette coal and spoke:

"Had enough of the drumming?"

"I can take it or leave it alone."

"Well, there'll be enough to satisfy everyone. It looks like a strong girl they chose this time. I'd lay even money she's still on her feet tomorrow at this time. You know, there isn't one girl in five who will go into her trance during daylight. I guess it proves this *is* the religion of darkness. If you'd like, I'll have a boy light you to your room."

The boy went ahead of them with an electric torch. There was no main stairs or main passageway. The house had been built at different times, and at different levels. At night it seemed like a maze. Staying at Crawford's

heels, Botamba kept up a steady, apprehensive muttering:

"O Master, thou art sticking thy head into a cobra's cave. If I had my way, O Master, I would sleep outside beneath the good sky, and not here in this man trap."

Crawford said from the side of his mouth, "Where's your guts?"

"Inside the skin of my belly, bwana, which will be more than thou canst say tomorrow. Aye, aye, Allah! That woman hath told him everything. He knoweth thou art here not for his good and he will stab thee in thy bed like a leopard in a pitfall. Aye, and then who will pay me my back wages, which are eighteen months overdue? Aye, and more since. Twenty! Twenty months thou art in arrears, and so will I go home a pauper in rags with my fanny hanging out to my two wives in Katanga."

"I've told you before, and this time—"

"He's right, Crawford," Foley said. "I don't trust that woman. What in hell is she doing here, anyhow? If you want my opinion about what she's doing—"

"I know what you've got on your dirty mind, and it's a lie."

"Hold on. You give me my split of the money and I'll—"

"Of what money?"

"The dough you collected for the package."

Crawford laughed bitterly. "Who the hell do you think has been paying your way for the last months? I'll tell you who—me. *Me*. Yeah, and I'm strapped. I'm flat as a two-dollar fiddle. So quit talking about money."

"I don't want to get killed. I'm not as old as you are, and I've still got a few good years—"

Crawford's derisive laugh stopped him. *"You?* Listen, Eddie, I've kept this from you because I didn't think it would be good for your peace of mind, but do you remember the time that union miner's doc examined you in the clinic up at Elizabethville? Well, I got him to one side and asked how your blood was holding up against malaria, and do you know what he said? Quote: 'Strictly

speaking, he hasn't any blood at all.' That's what he said. 'What that clown calls blood is actually a hybrid cross-mating between corpuscles and the malarial infusoria floating in a mixture of quinine, swamp water, and cheap whisky.' That's what he said, Eddie. So don't blow your vitamins around, because if you want the truth, you're a hollow shell living on borrowed time."

There were no beds, but thick sleeping mats were spread on the floor. Everything was of native manufacture, except for some blankets. Even the window screens were hand-loomed from wiry *tisa* fiber, made translucent from a treatment of hashab.

The windows opened out on hinges, giving access to a veranda just large enough for two footrest chairs, but a lattice of ironwood posts closed it in like a monkey cage. Below, along a cobbled path, two askaris plodded monotonously.

"Going someplace?" Crawford grinned.

They went to sleep amid the impulse of fetish drums. It was late when they awakened. The drums still beat. The house seemed to be empty, but when they started down the hall an askari appeared and pointed to the stairs. They walked across the compound and found the girl still going through the movements of the dance.

"Recording?" Crawford asked, stopping beside Leskawitz.

"It would take all the wire we got. You know how long she's stuck it out?"

"Well, she's not through yet. Watch her legs. She won't go until the muscles start to stiffen."

Sprague was spending his time in the cook's shamba, looking at plants through a hand lens.

"Is he a botanist, too?" Crawford asked.

"He could be. He's always picking up rare species for the museum. Has two species named after him."

"I had an uncle once they named a horse after. Paddy C. He won one time in the five-hundred-dollar claiming out at Tanforan. Two pounds' allowance for every six months out of the money. Paddy C. was the only horse

they ever had out there that got in at less than ninety-five pounds. You leaving here after you're through with these voodoos? Back to the States? Stay there, kid. You stay there. You knock around the tropics for ten years and you're no good for anybody. You know where I wish I was right now? In East St. Louis smelling the smoke from those railroad shops. Or over in Sportsman's Park."

"Watching the Cards play?"

"The Cards? Who in hell are they? The Browns, that's my team."

"The Red Sox beat them twenty-eight to five. I was listening on the ship's wireless. Oh, it was more than twenty-eight. It was twenty-eight in the bottom of the third."

"I don't care about that. Once I pick somebody, I stick with 'em."

When Sprague came from the shamba, examining some little flower buds, Crawford asked if he'd found something.

"*Racefolia,*" he said. "Do you read the newspapers? It was this genus, but a different species, that they think the Russians used in their Balkan trials to get confessions of heaven only knows what. Extract *Racefolia.* But this species is new to me."

"Maybe they'll name *it* after you, too."

"Oh, you know about that." It pleased Sprague. "Are you interested in botany?"

"Nothing I'd rather do than curl up with a book on botany. Botany or Boccaccio."

"Or blondes," Eddie said.

A cry went up from the voodoo circle, and the drums, for the first time in many hours, broke tempo. Fetishers and onlookers started jabbering all at once. When Crawford and Sprague got there, the girl had collapsed on the ground. She was cross-legged, her head tilted back rigidly. Her eyelids were open, her eyeballs rolled back inside her skull until nothing but whites could be seen.

Fetishers now crouched around to hear her speak. Her lips moved, and one of the fetishers, hopping around like

a decapitated rooster, shouted, "Nangoro! Nangoro! Nangoro!"

Someone named Nangoro was the thief. In a matter of seconds every native within earshot was shouting it.

Sprague cried, "Are you getting this?" and ran to Leskawitz and Mason, who were operating the hand generator and wire-recording outfit.

After a time one of the fetishers carried a cockerel from the hut. He held the flapping bird by its feet. He seated himself cross-legged and lifted the bird over his head.

The bird stopped flapping after a time and bent its head on a long, limber neck trying to see. Minutes passed.

"Now what?" Crawford asked Sprague, who was putting away his watch. "Are you familiar with this?"

"I've heard of it. He is calling the thief through the blood of the cockerel. Once the blood starts, the thief has to return, no matter where he is."

The fetisher held the cockerel without trembling as an hour passed. Two hours. His arms were still above his head, rigid in a self-induced catalepsy.

At last a drop of blood came from the cockerel's bill, hung for a while, and dropped. The fetisher, with a quick stab of his tongue, caught it. There was another drop, and another.

"Nangoro!" the natives started shouting again. The outliers of the crowd were pointing across the compound.

A black boy came running toward them across a field. He was stopped by one of the gates. He tried to claw his way through, apparently not even realizing that an askari was swinging it open for him. His eyes were fixed on the crowd, and, when the crowd parted, on the cockerel.

He was a Bantu boy of about eighteen, tribal scarred, clad only in sandals and a dhoti held by a string around his waist. A dozen steps from the fetisher he flung himself face forward on the ground, crying, *"No-fobwa! No-fobwa!"* with his eyes and voice showing his terror of death.

"No-fobwa!" he kept screaming.

The fetisher then moved. One of his hands left the

rooster's feet. He held the rooster with one hand while his other made signs in the air.

Realizing what he was about, the Bantu boy rose from the earth and sprang toward him, but other fetishers seized him, shrieking and fighting, and carried him back.

The fetisher's free hand was ready to seize the cockerel's neck.

Sprague was trying to get through the crowd. He shouted, "Stop him!"

Crawford and Mason moved at the same instant. The fetisher, realizing what was taking place, now grabbed for the cockerel's neck. The three men rolled in a struggling mass on the earth. Crawford came to his feet with the fetisher by the nape of the neck while Mason had his two hands.

The cockerel and the native boy lay on the ground in postures almost identical, limp, apparently dead. Sprague got to the black boy's side. He bent over, felt for his pulse, lifted his eyelid.

Crawford looked at the chicken and said, "The bird isn't dead."

Sprague bent over the boy and called, "Nangoro! *No-fobwa. Kuko no-fobwa!*"

The boy stirred. He looked at the cockerel. The bird had its bill open. It panted and made weak flopping movements with its wings. The boy tried to rise, but he fell back in weakness.

Sprague saw Clifton, who was long-striding down from the big house, and called, "Clifton! Have one of your boys bring some whisky."

Clifton's face was gaunt from fury. It was the first time Crawford had seen him reveal emotion of any kind. With an effort he contained it and said, "What's going on?"

Sprague was also angry. "Didn't you know?"

"That is a boy from my estate! He's a thief!"

"You don't exercise the power of life and death."

"Oh, *indeed*!"

"I'm familiar with the colonial codes. This was no native court. Now, send for some whisky."

Clifton took a deep breath. He forced a smile. He kicked his heels together in a military manner. He bowed and said, "You are my guest. The guest wishes to exercise the privilege of mercy. I bow before his wishes."

Chapter Nineteen

CLIFTON was his old self again in the evening, insisting that they remain for another night, and Sprague, after a mild hesitancy, seemed glad to agree. Aside from an hour of siesta, he had not slept for thirty-six hours. After a brandy in the big room and some puttering with a hand lens over his botanical finds of the morning, he bade Clifton good night and went to bed.

An hour later, Crawford was roused from his own bed by a shout, a crash, and two closely spaced pistol shots.

He ran to the door and flung it open. The hall was faintly illuminated by reflected light up the stairs. Bare feet thudded somewhere, and Mason was shouting, "Sprague! Let me in!"

Eddie, behind him, asked, "What's wrong?"

"I don't know."

They started down the hall and ran into an askari. The askari tried to get in the clear and bring his rifle around. The hall was narrow. He bumped his elbow. It gave Crawford time to push the gun barrel aside. With a coupled movement, he set his feet and dropped the askari with a right to the jaw.

He hit the floor like a fallen beef. Crawford took the gun from him and kept going. It was an unfamiliar mechanism, a German automatic, a Gewehr, like the one carried by the askari that first morning at the docks, and he kept fumbling with the safety.

"Know where his room is?" Eddie asked.

"I have no idea."

He glimpsed the moving rays of an electric torch, turned a corner, and saw Mason trying to drive shoulder first through a door while Leskawitz held the light for him.

The door was heavy teak. It was barred on the inside. He lunged into it again, but it held firm.

"Stand back!" Crawford said.

He ran up, got the stock of the Gewehr in the bend of his right arm, lifted it to tilt the barrel at a steep angle downward, and poured its full magazine through.

Mason and Leskawitz, putting their weight together, made the weakened bar splinter, and they were inside.

The room was wired to the electrical system, and Mason switched on the light.

Sprague was on the floor beside his bed, tangled in a sheet. He bled from a knife wound in his back.

He saw the light and tried to rise. Mason, on one knee, looked at the wound. The blade had struck, but Sprague had evidently been in movement, making it miss its mark. It was a vicious, curving cut, but its depth had not been sufficient to strike a vital spot.

"He's alive by one inch," Crawford said.

"What happened?" Mason asked him.

Sprague tried to answer, but all he could get from his lips was a grunt of pain.

Crawford saw a gun on the floor and picked it up. It was the Smith & Wesson .32 he'd seen a couple of times inside Sprague's coat.

"*You* did the shooting, then!"

The hall outside was filled with natives, their eyeballs rolled white from excitement. Half a minute later they made way for Clifton.

Clifton had a Luger pistol in his hand. "What was that shooting?" He saw Sprague. "Are you hurt? What happened?"

Mason, with his sharp temper, cried, "Maybe *you* should tell *us* what happened. Somebody got in here and knifed him."

Clifton looked startled and backed off a step, shaking his head. "My God, don't look at me. It certainly wasn't with *my* knowledge. Nothing like this ever happened in my house before. Is he wounded badly? Here, let me—"

"Stay away from him. Do you have some merthiolate or anything?"

Clifton sent a boy for the medicine kit. He kept saying

he couldn't understand it. "You don't think on account of that argument we had this afternoon—"

Mason said, "I didn't accuse you."

The medicine kit came, and Mason pawed through it. He used merthiolate. "This stuff is next to useless for deep infection, and that's the chief danger."

Clifton said, "I have some dry penicillin to mix with water. It's ten months old, but the makers guaranteed it for a year.'"

"You have a hypodermic syringe?"

"Yes. I'll make the injection. I do it all the time for the natives. Or if you'd rather—"

Crawford said, "Keep your penicillin."

"Say, this man is—"

"Yeah, he's sick. But he's *our* man. I have the stuff to ward off infection in my uniform can in town. Send the jeep and get it. It shouldn't take more than half an hour."

"What do you have?" Mason asked.

"Sulfadiazine."

Mason cried, "Oh, hell—"

Sprague said, "Tell him to get the sulfadiazine."

Crawford sent Botamba with the driver, instructing him to make certain that the Mauser pistol was inside the can.

While waiting, Crawford examined the room. The attacker had gained entrance by cutting through the woven bamboo wall, probably with a bush knife. There was a smear of blood on one of the cut bamboo tips.

"You hit him with that thirty-two, Doc," Crawford said. He laughed and added, "Don't you know it's impolite to pack a gun inside the man's compound? Or maybe you didn't trust him any farther than I do."

Half an hour and three cigarettes later, Botamba ran up the stairs carrying the uniform can. Crawford gave Sprague the medicine, and strapped the Mauser on.

"There!" he said with a grin on his ugly Buddha face. "I feel more like a free and equal citizen of East St. Louis."

Chapter Twenty

BACK in his room, using the Gewehr rifle, he pried loose two of the ironwood bars that made a cage of the veranda and watched the pathway below to accustom himself to the routine of the two askaris who were on sentry duty.

Eddie said, "It's that girl that's bothering you. She'll end up by getting you killed."

"No, it's not the girl. I'm playing a hunch. I'll tell you what it is. It's that stuff Doc found in the shamba. *Racefolia*-some-damned-thing. That's why Clifton tried to knock him off."

"What are you talking about?"

"You wouldn't know about those things, Eddie. Music, that's your line. The three B's—Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. My three B's are botany, Boccaccio, and blondes, remember? Sprague and I are 'way out of your class."

The askaris were out of sight. He swung out, reached high above, grabbed the third-story veranda base, and pulled himself up. He climbed a length of cornice, got hold of the rain gutter, pulled himself over that, and lay flat.

The askaris were below again. When they turned away he crawled to the tile roof, crouched, and ran up the slant until one of the minor gables hid him.

The ventilators of some third-story rooms projected like tiny gabled huts from the tiles. He used them for concealment and, where the tiles were especially slick and steep, for support.

Light glowed from one of them. He stopped to listen. There was no sound. He moved on. Midway along another segment of the roof, a second was lighted. He listened there, too. Someone was stirring in the room below. A current of warm air, rising through the nettings of the ventilator, touched his nostrils laden with Chari's perfume. It gave him the old, gutless feeling.

He crouched and listened. He was there for many minutes. He got to his feet and paused again. Someone had rapped on a door. She said, "Yes?"

Clifton's voice: "Chari?"

"Yes!"

The door rattled.

She said with laughter and defiance, "It's locked. Didn't you think it would be?"

"I could kick it in."

"I have a gun."

After a few seconds Clifton said, "I only wanted to ask if you'd seen him."

"I jus' came from there. I waited for heem since mid-afternoon. I don't know where he went. I will go back tomorrow morning."

He cursed. "I have to talk to him."

"Well, see heem yourself. I am tired. I am ver' tired."

"Will he come tomorrow morning?"

"He will not come so long as they are here. He says you are a fool to invite them here!"

Clifton laughed without humor, and there was no more sound of him. He had gone away.

Crawford was tempted to call her. He didn't. He moved on across the roof, reached the low eaves facing the servants' quarters, and dropped to the ground.

Using shadows for cover, he reached the compound wall and scaled it without detection. From there he cut directly across the ridge toward the house he had located from the high treetop the night before.

Again it was lighted. The light guided him as he hunted a path through the mimosa bush. The clearing inside was a great deal larger than he had supposed. It was cut up into small patches by dense brier fences. The things he had assumed to be shade were actually palm-covered sun roofs of a type used elsewhere for the growing of wrapper tobacco. The air was filled with a sweetish odor. It was not tobacco blossom. It came from the tiny blue flowers that tufted the foot-high herbs growing in the garden rows.

He pulled one of them by its roots. It seemed to be identical to the blossom Sprague had been examining through his hand lens that morning.

He crushed the plant to a tight wad and thrust it in his hip pocket.

The moon was out, and he had to move carefully. A pathway took him between two of the brier fences. He reached shadow beneath one of the roofs. There he breathed and wiped sweat off his face. He turned and almost stepped on the outflung hand of a man.

He lunged back, the Mauser drawn by reflex. Then he realized that the man was dead. He got down on one knee. The man's head was bent at an unnatural angle. His neck had been snapped. He had been dead for some hours. The man was Dr. Douval.

He could tell no more without lighting a match, and a match was too risky. He moved on. His foot touched metal. A gun had fallen in some low ground cover. He picked it up. It was the chrome-plated Walther that Douval had pointed at him that night in Mbwemo.

He sniffed the muzzle and pulled the clip. No burned powder, and the clip was full. Douval had drawn, but he hadn't had time to fire.

He walked along beneath the shade of one roof after another and reached the rear door of the house.

The house seemed to be empty. With the Mauser drawn he went inside.

Douval had evidently been living there. The front end of the house was devoted to living quarters; the central portion was filled with books, scientific equipment, and filing cabinets; and the rear portion, which was more of a shed, held chemicals, cultivators, grafting tools, drying frames, and all the other paraphernalia of an agricultural experiment station.

One of the doors had been locked and smashed open. Shelves, reaching from floor to ceiling, were lined with metal cans, each labeled with a serial number and date. One of them had been upset and its contents of little blackish berries was spilled across the floor.

He looked in other cans. All of them were filled with the black berries. He took a handful for his other hip pocket.

Leaving, he was hit by the almost uncontrollable impulse to run. He fought it down. He retraced his steps across the shamba, through the mimosa. He crossed the ridge and scaled the compound fence. There was no sign that anyone had seen him. Rain started to patter. It grew heavier, and fell steadily.

It helped him cross to the house without detection. He reached the roof as he had planned, from fuel shed to cook shed to one of the low gables to the top gable itself.

Less than two hours had elapsed, and once again he stood over the ventilator to Chari's room.

Chapter Twenty-one

He wanted to call to her but other ventilators to other rooms were nearby. His voice might be heard.

He tore the insect bar away. There were shutters beneath it. He cut through one after another with his folding machete.

With head and shoulders thrust inside, out of the rain, he called, "Chari!"

She did not answer, but her light snoring had stopped and he knew she was staring through the darkness.

"Chari!"

She knew his voice, and said with apparent relief, "Where are you?"

"Here!" He slid through, hung by his hands, and dropped.

The floor was farther than he expected. He hit some small bit of furniture. It turned over and sent him sprawling.

He got to his feet and, groping, touched the mosquito curtain that surrounded her bed.

He could hear the rustle of bed clothing. He had come to tell her about Douval. He had come to ask her about the blue-flowering plants. He had come, perhaps, to take her away. But now he had forgotten all those things. The room with its warmth and perfume had an unsteadying effect; he was no longer able to direct his thoughts.

He felt her moving around. It took him a moment to realize what she was doing. His knee was pressed against a side panel of her bed and she was finding her way through the nettings on the other side.

"Chari, where are you?"

"Get out of my room!"

The words shocked him. Her response was utterly different from what he had expected. It didn't fit with her initial relief at knowing who he was.

"Chari, this is Crawford."

"I know. And I have a gun. Thees time I will not miss."

"What's the matter?"

"I hate you, that's the matter. Can't you understand that? You're ugly, you have a foul mouth. I hate you."

He could still hardly believe. He wanted to plead with her. He would have got down on his knees, done anything. He had no pride left, he wanted her so desperately.

"Get out! I warn you, don't try to come closer."

The position of her voice had changed. He groped along, guided by one hand on the mosquito curtain. His foot touched a stool. He tried to shove it out of his way. It caught in the mattings. He nearly tripped, but got over it, and around the foot of the bed.

She hissed, "I tell you, I have a gun!"

"I know."

"I'll shoot."

"Go ahead."

She hesitated. "Or perhaps you would rather I called for *heem*."

"Who?"

"Cleefton."

"No, you won't!"

"I will. He is in the nex' room."

"How will he get in?"

"He has a key!" She said it with feline emphasis, and he knew she wanted to torment him. "You hear, he has a key to my room! He can come in when he pleases. See, I don't care for you any more. It is heem!"

He knew what was troubling her. He should have known all along. It was memory of that night when she had offered herself to him in the rest house.

He said, "Chari, don't you understand? I wanted you more than anything in my life, but I wanted you for keeps. I didn't want to look back on a rotten start like that."

"I don' know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do. And you're not living with Clifton."

"How are you so sure?"

He didn't want to tell her about overhearing their conversation through the ventilator. "I know, that's all."

"But I still have a husband."

The defiance was burned out of her. It made him remember her as she had been after fever when any little thing would make her laugh and cry at almost the same moment.

She said, "Crawford!" with her peculiar accent. "Crawford, he is still between us."

"Douval?"

"Yes."

He didn't want to tell her that he was dead. He didn't take time to analyze the reasons—he just didn't want to.

He said, "He's not really your husband!"

"Legally, he is. Our names on the government books at Bulawayo. I was alone, weethout friends. My father was his associate. He died. The man I was to have married—also dead. Killed. He was captain in the army of France. Killed fighting in Indo-China. I was desolate. I did not wish to live. I thought there would never be another man for me. Dr. Douval was so good, so kind. He seemed like my father. And he needed me. Can you understand?"

"I guess I can."

"But he was never a *husband*. Not—like that. Like that other one could have been. Like you. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Then I met you. You were very different from that other man, and yet you reminded me of heem. Can you understand that? Can you understand what I want to say? When you held me in your arms I said, 'I will pretend it is heem.' I said that. But soon I forgot all about heem. Do you understand?" She did not wait for his answer. She rushed straight on. "And then that time in the rest house. Listen—I thought I should never get out alive. I thought I should die that night. But I wanted you first. Do you think I am shameless? Do you—"

"No!"

He found her. She was huddled in the corner of the

room. Her back was partly toward him. She still held the gun. He took it from her fingers.

He said, "That's all over with. You're *not* somebody else's wife. You're *my* wife. Are you listening, Chari? You're *my* wife. You're mine forever. Do you hear that?"

She seemed to be crying. He took hold of her and turned her to face him. She wore a long, loose sleeping robe.

She clung to him. Her hands clutched the front of his shirt.

"Yes!" she whispered. "Yes."

She kept saying the word as he lifted her and carried her. Darkness meant nothing. He found where she had tossed the mosquito nettings aside. The floor made no sensation under his feet. He moved without volition, he was carried by a warm cloud, he was guided unerringly by instinct older than self, older than history, as old as the love of the first man for the first woman.

Chapter Twenty-two

LATER, much later, he roused himself. He reached and touched her arm. His feelings toward her had undergone a transformation. He felt gentle toward her. He wanted to protect her, tonight and forever.

They talked of small things. He could see about him in the room. Light came through the jalousies of a window looking out on a court, and from the torn nettings of the ventilator above. It was almost dawn.

He arose. He told her about Douval, that he was dead. He told her as gently as he could.

"I suspected," she whispered. "When you came, by something you said. You theenk I am hardhearted not to weep? He could not live long. It was for me he wanted to sell the *colonga.*"

"What do you mean?"

"The plants. Some secret and wonderful drug comes from them. I do not quite understand. He said he could sell some of the plants for a great deal of money."

"Yeah. Who to?"

"I don' know."

"That's what you had in the package?"

"Yes. We were here before. He secured some of the plants. They are roots, weeth buds grafted on. Then when they were lost, he decided to come back. A great risk, but for me he did it. Clifton might have killed heem. But he did not. They made an agreement. Edmond was a great man of science, he could develop the plants—"

"And they were both Nazis."

"I don' know. I know notheeng about that."

"Sure, kid. I'm sorry. I'm not trying to make it tough on you. It's just that this was pretty powerful stuff. A little of it makes men walk around like zombis, isn't that the truth? A lot of it might make a whole country walk around like zombis."

"I don' know."

"Well, we've got to get out of here. We've got to get Sprague and his boys out, too. When Clifton finds that somebody has visited that shamba—"

"Who killed heem?"

"I don't know. Maybe Clifton. Listen, it wasn't me!"

"Of course not. I never thought so."

He did not mention his suspicion of Runkhammer. "I'll round up Sprague and his men. Eddie and Botamba, too. You get ready. Meet us on the terrace. We'll be all together then, with a few guns to make it tough if he starts anything." He looked up at the ventilator. "That'd be a bit of a climb."

She slipped on a wrap and opened the door. The hall was still a well of blackness. "This way. Eet is safe enough."

"Where are his rooms?"

"Clifton? On the other side of the house. He has a Berber wife. You have heard her sing? Go straight ahead, turn left, then down some stairs, and the lower hall will take you to the drawing room. You know the way from there."

"Yeah. Remember—on the terrace. If you have any spare ammunition for the Browning, bring it along."

He kissed her and hurried down the hall. He found the big room. It was empty. He climbed the stairs. He hesitated between going to Sprague's room and his own, and chose the latter.

The door was closed. He expected it to be barred, but it moved to his touch and Ed Foley shouted, "Look out!"

He kept going, diving face forward to the floor, the Mauser drawn.

He struck on an outflung hand and twisted over with gun flame in his face. He was half blinded by pulverized wood and the fragments of mattings. Mombu had been waiting with a rifle in his hands.

He fired. The bullet smashed Mombu back. Crawford fired again and again as he crawled to what cover he could find. He was briefly aware of Clifton, and of Foley and Bo-

tamba, handcuffed back to back against a wall pillar.

He was down behind some rolled-up sleeping mats. He raised himself to one knee, looking for Clifton, but he had escaped to the hall and was shouting for his askaris.

Crawford followed him, down the hall, down the stairs. Clifton was in the big room, backing away, the Luger in his hand.

They exchanged four shots. Four ticks of a watch would have covered them all. Clifton spun and dropped his gun. He limber-legged it across the room, and collapsed a few steps from the door.

Askaris ran through the house. They came across the compound from huts, from sentry beats, from pillboxes by the gates.

He got Clifton's gun, and found the keys to the handcuffs. Then, acting on impulse, he dumped Clifton's body out on the terrace.

The askaris drew back. They retreated without leadership, all jabbering at once. Crawford returned to the room and released Foley and Botamba.

"You damned fool!" Eddie said, beating his arms to get circulation back in them. "You should have known those black guards would see the bars gone from the window. We been chained up all night."

Sprague, Mason, and Leskawitz were in the big room when he returned. Sprague, moving carefully to keep his wound from opening, had the .32 ready for business.

"Good Lord!" he kept repeating. "Good Lord, what an experience! What a hell this has turned into!"

Crawford said. "You write *this* book of botany, Doc, and they'll serialize it in *True* magazine."

"He's dead? Clifton? A psychopath. Like Hitler. They were friends, I've heard. No truth to it, I suppose."

"Truth enough. They were old buddies from Berchtesgaden. I'll lay dollars it was Adolf who started him out developing the stuff." He remembered the plants and the black berries in his hip pocket and gave them to him. "Here. I picked these up at a shamba last night."

Sprague sat down with the gun in his lap and looked at

them. "Yes. I can't be sure yet, but this seems to be the same genus. Different species. They were developing a new, more potent variety, I suppose. The present types only refine out to a few parts in a thousand. It's similar to opium in effect. That is, it affects the central nervous system, only opium wears off, and this exercises a persistent depression. You have seen the effect on his black men. I suppose he was experimenting on them. And that poor girl at Heggrie's—Willa. I'll wager on her, too. Think of the possibilities if it were to be produced in real quantity. Think of how it could be used against entire populations."

"Then we should go over the ridge with Clifton's supply of petrol and burn the whole lousy spread."

He had been thinking of Douval and the man who had killed him. He said, "I'm going to look around," and went outside.

Chapter Twenty-three

THE COMPOUND was clear. He expected no more trouble from the askaris. He walked to the garage and drove the jeep out.

Chari came running and he waited without opening the door. "You go back, kid." He didn't want her to see Douval with his head bent over on its broken neck. "You stay here. I'll be right back. I just want to make sure of something."

He drove to the west gate. It was locked and no one was there to open it. He shot the lock off and opened it himself. He drove through the cut between the hills and back to the shamba.

He got out in the cover of bush and listened for a few minutes, then he walked around beneath the sheds as he had the night before.

He stopped a hundred meters from the house and called, "Runkhammer!"

He had expected no answer, and it was a shock when Runkhammer stepped from a storage house with the Beretta under his arm.

"Well, chappie!" he said, grinning with his strong teeth. "You got the kind of eyes that see through walls? Now, how'd you know where to find the old Hammer?"

"I was here last night. I recognized your handiwork."

"Oh, *him!* He double-crossed me up in Sudan, and a man double-crosses the Hammer only once. So I came down here and got him." He thrust out his big hands and slowly closed them. "Like that." He changed his tone, grinning through his clamped teeth again. "I was back to the village looking for you, Yank, but they said you were gone. To the castle, rubbing elbows with the men of science, eating good canned food from France while old Runkhammer looked for Adolf and did the dirty work. Well, it was no use. No Adolf. No nothing. A washout.

But there'll be another time, Yank. We'll team up sometime for the real money."

"This sounds like farewell."

"Now, that's what it is. I got wind of something over around Kivu, and I'm heading there. It's hail and farewell, laddie. Poorer, but wiser. Did you come for the Doc's body? Help yourself."

There was mud on Runkhammer's hands. A shovel with fresh earth on it stood by the shamba gate behind him. He had been making a package of his own.

"*You* never double-cross anybody!" Crawford said.

"Now, what could you mean by that?"

"I mean you've run onto something here and you intend to keep it for yourself. You intend to light out with a bag of those graftings and sell 'em to the Ruskies or anybody else that'll pay your price."

Runkhammer moved back as far as he could against the limit of the brier fence. He kept his shoulder thrust toward Crawford and the Beretta on the other side of him.

"You're smart, Crawford. You're a hard man to fool. Damn it, I always liked you. I used to like to hear you shoot your guff about East St. Louis and listen to all your cross-eyed schemes for making money. I did for a fact, and that's why it's going to hurt me to tear your guts out with this Dago automatic."

"Are you sure I came alone?"

Runkhammer had heard the car come to a stop, and now he feared that someone was across the shamba. His eyes knifed around, and Crawford's hand came up weighted by the Mauser.

Runkhammer had an instantaneous judgment of the situation. He knew he lacked time to bring the submachine gun's muzzle around, so he drove the butt at Crawford's forearm.

The blow paralyzed Crawford's hand. He kept the Mauser for a second, but he couldn't fire with his stiffened fingers.

Runkhammer, with a return swing of the steel-shod butt, tried to smash his skull.

Crawford weaved enough to make it miss. The force of his effort carried Runkhammer off balance, and Crawford hit him.

Runkhammer lost the Beretta. He sagged to the fence, recovered himself, and charged.

He carried Crawford before him. It was like the charge of a rhino. Crawford had felt his strength before, and he knew better than to oppose it. He let himself be carried. He fell. He did so deliberately. He landed on his back, legs doubled, and straightened them with all the uncoiling power of his body.

It stunned Runkhammer to a stop. He reeled backward. His mouth was open, his eyes were like a stunned beef's. His back hit the corner post of the sun shed. The post was torn loose; the roof sagged, spilling wilted palm fronds over him.

He got his balance and grabbed the pole. He fell with the pole under him. He got up and hurled it, but Crawford was ready.

He bent over, felt it sail above his back, and coming up, smashed Runkhammer to the ground. Runkhammer got up and was downed again. He was dazed, his eyes would not focus, he was helpless and Gargantuan, but still he got up to be hammered down again and again.

Finally his knees no longer held him. He collapsed headlong into the briers. He extricated himself and fell again. He kept getting words through his battered lips. "Yank, I'm finished. Enough. You wouldn't—hit a man—down. Old pals, Yank. Old days—in Zanzibar. Old days—in Cairo. Remember. This is a hell of a way—to treat—your old pal Runkhammer."

Crawford got the guns. He watched Runkhammer get to his feet and stagger away, half walking, half running across the shamba, through the tangle of mimosa, through waist-deep grass, toward mountains and jungle footpaths and God only knew where.

It was evening. Crawford stood beside Chari in the compound while Mason and Leskawitz packed equipment in

the jeep to return to the village. Over the ridge there was still a little petrol smoke rising from the burned-out shamba.

He said, "There went a million bucks up in smoke. You know, I'm glad. It gives me a good feeling. It proves that a lot of people are wrong. It proves there are some things Jim Crawford won't do for money."

"Aye, aye, Allah!" Botamba chanted. "A million bucks thou hast booted. Behold me in rags and wretchedness. Alms, alms in the name of Allah!"

Crawford said to Chari, "And to think we came here looking for Hitler!"

"Oh, *he* isn't here any more."

He drew his shoulders up rigidly and took a single very deep breath. "Now, kid. Now, Chari. Just hold on."

"But he isn't! Edmond tol' me he wasn't. He was here, but he left. He—"

"Now wait a second—"

"Oh, it wasn't lately. It was one other time we were here. Before I ever see you. Edmond came to the house unexpectedly, and there he was, jus' as plain as anyone could be, playing records on the gramophone, and eet was Heetler. Seence then he lef' on account of the government police, and now he is at another concession, south of here, near Lake Tanganyika. A concessioner by the name of Ullmann. Schulz von Ullmann, I theenk he said—"

"All right, kid. Just let it lie. I'm not going for any more of that. No more zombis, no more Adolf. All I want is to hear the baseball scores on the wireless."

Overhearing the word zombi, Botamba said, "Aye, this is the kraal of the devil and may never the sun set on me within its walls again. Dost thou know, O Master, that that Mombu, he of the empty eyes, did walk away carrying two of thy pistol bullets in his body without shedding one drop of blood inside that room? Aye, Allah, may lightning burn out my tongue if it is not so."

Sprague, Mason, and Leskawitz gathered around, plying Botamba with questions, and Crawford walked away from them.

"There's just so much of this a person can stand," he said to Ed Foley. "Just so much and then you get fed up."

"That's right. All I want to see are some bright lights and decent food."

"Yeah, you bet! I'll go for that." He lowered his voice. "Say by the way, you've been down around Lake Tanganyika. Were you ever acquainted with a concessioner by the name of Ullmann? I think it's Schulz von Ullmann. . . ."

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